The Unshattered Teacup

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/31514144.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, Abigail Hobbs
Additional Tags:	Time Travel, Magical Realism, Time Traveler Hannibal, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, hannibal lecter is an idiot, Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal, Fix-It, Time Travel Fix-It, Caring Hannibal Lecter, Abigail Hobbs Lives, Dark Abigail Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs is a Cannibal, Will Graham is a Cannibal, A little later on though, Mild Sexual Content
Language:	English
Collections:	Wibals, Absolute Favorites
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-25 Completed: 2021-09-22 Words: 25,323 Chapters: 15/15

The Unshattered Teacup

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Summary

Hannibal Lecter had been working on a way to turn back time for nearly all of his life, but at the perfect moment, his equation works, and gives him a second chance with Will, ensuring that he won't lose him again. Now, he'll treat Will right the first time.

Chapter 1

The true equation of time is elusive, and intricate, winding many different paths and having to do with every small detail that makes one timeline unique from another. Remembering the smallest of details was what Hannibal did best, it was how his mind palace was so vast, terrifying, and beautiful. He put the details into the numbers, the numbers on the paper, for hours on end. Everything he could recall since Will, and he remembered everything in more detail since that first day they met in Jack Crawford's office.

He walked through the door of Will's house, and turned to see that said man was finally awake. The notebook lay open on the bed next to him, and he stared at it. Hannibal wondered if he knew what they all meant, or if he just saw a book of numbers. He picked up his book. He'd worked it all out until that day, all of the calculations. He sat and looked over to Will, who avoided his eyes.

How reminiscent. Hannibal thought.

"Do we talk about teacups, and time, and the rules of disorder?" he asked.

"The teacup's broken. It's never going to gather itself back together again" Will replied, voice rough.

Hannibal felt his heart pang in his ribcage. "Not even in your mind?" Will didn't have to answer for Hannibal to know his answer, "Your memory palace is building, it's full of new things. It shares some rooms with my own. I've discovered you there, victorious". Hopeful, a tentative olive branch.

"When it comes to you and me, there can be decisive victory". Will denied it.

"We are in zero-sum game?"

Will's following silence was hurtful, Hannibal had hoped he'd at least talk to him again. He began to build this moment in his palace, and immediately copied the room down, inch for inch, in his work.

"I miss my dogs, I'm not gonna miss you" Will said, quietly.

Hannibal's eyes flicked up, not believing the words.

Will could tell this, because he continued, "I'm not gonna find you, I'm not going to look for you, I don't want to know where you are, or what you do. I don't want to think about you anymore"

The numbers now created formulas of abandonment, of sheer and utter loss. Hannibal couldn't refrain from welling up, but he looked up from his book.

“You delight in wickedness and then berate yourself for that delight” he said. It was the most straightforward he could be.

“You delight. I tolerate” Will said.

Will is lost to me, Hannibal thought, *he’s put up his forts to me, and he will never let me in again.* Will’s forts went into the numbers, Hannibal’s tears into the ink, the shattered remains of a teacup that almost came together went towards an impossible solution.

“I don’t have your appetite. Goodbye Hannibal”

Hannibal blinked. His equation would only be finished if he finished the last decimal, but it was enough to hear the words, let alone converting and writing them down. After taking a moment to compose himself enough that he could stand, Hannibal slowly walked away from Will. The moment the door was shut behind him, he allowed the tears to slip. A single, wretched sob came from his chest, but no noise came from his throat. He read over his lines, again and again, trying to figure out which of the numbers had gone wrong, how he could tweak them to get his and Will’s solution. The final numbers he needed, they weren’t fair, they were the numbers that destroyed everything. *Goodbye Hannibal*. Those were the worst of the mistakes, they were concrete, and Will had meant them. If they could be erased, if it all could go back, then perhaps the outcome would be in their favor.

He wrote his final square roots in, the decimals, the Greek letters, everything that translated to Will’s final goodbye. He took everything into account. The way that Will looked at him, the tone in his voice as the sound of *Goodbye Hannibal* was released into the room. It was cruel, it was animalistic, and beautiful but horrible. Hannibal spent the remainder of the afternoon on the back porch, reading over, and over his formula. It was perfect, but it wouldn’t work, of course not. He’d given up hours ago, he didn’t even know why he was still reading it over. He had to stop, once he couldn’t see the notebook in the moonless night. He clutched it to his chest, tempted to tear every scrap of paper from it and burn them. It mocked him with its perfection, yet refusal to work, to reverse as it was supposed to.

Hannibal pleaded with fate that Will would step onto the porch and do something. Something other than waiting for him to leave. Perhaps hold him there? Perhaps say that all was not lost, that they still had a chance. Time passed, but Will never came. The night only grew deeper, but the pitch silence was interrupted by the distant sounds of police sirens and lights. So Jack Crawford had traced them back already, Hannibal had only had a day with Will, it wasn’t enough. Hannibal took a deep breath, hearing several cars pull up to the house, several men getting out and intruding on Will’s home. It was the only option he wanted; if he had to live without Will, he would do so in the hopes that Will would return to him someday, and he’d make it as easy as he could for that to happen. Hannibal closed his eyes, tucking his notebook into his jacket.

I’ll see you when you’ll have me, Will .

It was not Wolf Trap Virginia when Hannibal opened his eyes. It was not the cold, snowy night, nor the sound of sirens and the flashing lights. It took him a moment for his eyes to adjust to his surroundings, but he recognized it, though he didn’t believe what it was. It was

morning, and he was lying in his bed, in Baltimore. Everything felt the same as it would have, in his home. The air, the sheets, everything.

He wondered, for a considerable time, if he was going mental. After a few minutes of making sure that he still had a heartbeat, and that he wasn't in a coma, he got out of bed. All of his clothes were as they were, organized, neat, pristine. He dressed, noting the fabric feeling real on his skin. He went downstairs, and his kitchen was not soiled with blood. All of his tools were in the proper places, fridge stocked. Unsure of what else to do, and seeing no way that it could do any harm, Hannibal began to cook.

He considered the possibility of this all being a massive hallucination, though he wouldn't know what caused it. Perhaps he'd been shot in the head by the authorities, and this was all a brief flicker in his frontal lobe before he died. So, seeing no harm in it, he continued with his morning, eating, then cleaning up breakfast. Curiously, he checked his calendar. Under the date, it read 'Meet with Crawford, Quantico, 10:30'.

How peculiar , he thought.

He got ready, dressed in a plain, tan suit, waiting for the world to come to a sudden halt. Perhaps he'd finally meet God, who he'd been so looking forward to speaking with. His Bentley was the same as it had been, started, operated the same. It was the same long, uneventful drive to the FBI academy in Quantico. Hannibal thought, perhaps, he didn't give his own memory enough credit from time to time.

This is all quite realistic, he complimented himself.

Arriving in Quantico, he got an overpowering sense of deja vu, but he supposed that was normal for living through memories he'd made. Jack Crawford's office was in perfect detail, even Jack's cologne was to a T. But more than anything, Will was perfection. Every curve, curl, edge, crevice, all of it was flawless. His voice was exactly as Hannibal remembered it to be on that day; impatient, quiet, and sharp. Hannibal couldn't help but to stare, he didn't think that he'd ever see Will's face again, and here he was, in their memory palace.

"Tasteless" Will spat, in his chair.

"Do you have trouble with taste?" Hannibal asked, in accordance to his memory.

"My thoughts are often not tasty"

"Nor mine. No effective barriers"

"I build forts"

"Associations come quickly"

"So do forts"

Hannibal withheld a chuckle. *Oh, Will* .

Hannibal sat down in the chair to Will's left. "Not fond of eye contact, are you?" he asked. He'd always adored this little speech.

"Eyes are distracting. You see too much, you don't see enough and- and- it's hard to focus when you're thinking, um, 'Oh those whites are really white' or, 'He must have hepatitis' or, 'Oh, is that a burst vein?'"

Hannibal chuckled, his smile wide.

"So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible, Jack?"

"Yes?" Jack answered, sitting down just as he had on that day.

"I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love" Hannibal allowed his affection to flood his tone. Was that how he'd sounded that day?

"Whose profile are you working on? Whose profile is he working on?" Will's tone rose.

"I'm sorry Will, observing is what we do, I can't shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off"

" *Please* , don't psychoanalyze me, you won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed"

"None of what I said was in accusation, Will, but it must be difficult to live like *this* "

Hannibal was surprised at himself. That wasn't what happened that day at all. Will stared at Hannibal, his face projecting aggravation, but his eyes betraying that with deep consideration. In an instant, the fort was up again, and Will grabbed his jacket and walked out.

What is this? Hannibal asked himself, *Is this a trick of my mind?*

"Maybe we shouldn't poke him like that doctor. Perhaps a less, uh, direct approach?" Jack said.

Hannibal considered the situation. That wasn't part of his memory. He briefly remembered back to his equation to reverse time, but it felt less than possible, even at the time of creating it. Now, Hannibal wasn't sure. He turned to Jack, remembering what he'd told him before.

"What he has is pure empathy, he can assume your point of view, or mine, and maybe some other points of view that scare him. It's an uncomfortable gift Jack. Perception's a tool that's pointed on both ends. This cannibal you have him getting to know, I think I can help good Will see his face"

Jack nodded, and Hannibal wondered if he would see Will again, in the same way as last time.

Chapter 2

When Hannibal woke that second morning, after going to work the previous day and hearing every story he'd already heard, he began to believe that perhaps something strange had happened to him. Had his formula been correct? How had he even used it without meaning to?

After a good amount of time thinking about it (almost the entire day, the only reason he gave useful insight to his patients was because he already knew what to tell them), his options, and what this meant for him, he came to the conclusion that this was another chance. Knowing everything from hindsight, Hannibal now had the upper hand on the FBI, Jack Crawford, even Will.

Will had felt the striking attraction between them long before everything had happened, Hannibal was sure, only he didn't know exactly *when* . There were many little moments throughout their relationship where Hannibal had fallen for Will, and fallen *hard* , but for Will, had there been a tipping point?

The next day he was being flown out to Minnesota to help consult on the Shrike case, and this realization brought him to the fact that Abigail still lived and she would continue to do so, as long as Will could get to her in time. Which he would. Hannibal had a few moments to take in the fact that his family was all alive and well, they just didn't know each other yet.

He spent the flight in his memory palace, recalling everything he'd done and said to Will on that first day they'd spent together. It had been such fun, back then, watching the man making his connections. It was beautiful, looking back on it.

There was also the matter of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He was still restraining himself from murdering his daughter, but not well. His death, and Abigail's subsequent injury, had played a significant role in the girl's realizations about who she really is. Not to mention that killing Hobbs was necessary for Will's becoming as well. As much as he was upset to think of it, Hannibal knew that he would still have to call the house. Cassie Boyle was also an issue, she had to go as well. That was the first time Will had seen him, however small the amount of Hannibal it was.

The girl had screamed and cried, but ultimately lost the fight, just as she had before. He put everything the way he had originally designed, removing Cassie's lungs from her chest alive, spearing her body on the antlers of a stag, taking great care to make sure that Will saw through his façade of hiding behind the identity of the Shrike. Of course he would, wouldn't he?

Hannibal showed up the next morning outside of Will's motel door, his fresh protein scramble packed into two separate bowls. He hesitated, looking at the door. The situation was delicate, Will was delicate, and Hannibal couldn't break him again. He breathed deeply, before knocking three times. After a moment, the door swung back, and Will's face was

illuminated by the sunshine. Hannibal lost his breath for a moment, as Will's beauty was only enhanced by the rays. And his *eyes* .

Chartreuse in sunshine, shining, green petals in the pale scape of your beautiful skin. Oh Will. Hannibal almost forgot to speak.

"Good morning Will", he breathed, "may I come in?

Will glanced behind him. "Where's Crawford?" he asked.

"Deposed in court, the adventure will be yours and mine today" Hannibal smiled, not receiving a smile in return, "May I come in?"

Will looked him up and down, before stepping backwards and allowing him inside. Hannibal followed, breathing in Will's scent. It was earthy, musky, with traces of his horrendous aftershave, and exactly as it was supposed to be. Hannibal opened the curtains, letting the sunshine fall onto Will's features once more.

"I am very careful about what I put into my body," he began, sitting down at the small motel table, "which means I end up preparing most meals myself"

Will looked at him, getting the message that he should sit down as well, and doing so. Hannibal passed Will a plate, and the bowl.

"A little protein scramble to start the day, some eggs, some sausage" he trailed off as he watched Will raise a bite of meat to his mouth. Of all the things that had stayed the same, Hannibal had always enjoyed watching Will eat his meals, it was intimate and domestic, especially now. His eyes were on Will's lips, his jaw, watching him chew and taste.

"It's delicious, thank you" Will said.

"My pleasure"

Hannibal stared across the table, Will never lifting his eyes to catch him.

"I would apologize for my analytical ambush, but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you will tire of that eventually, so I have to consider using apologies sparingly" Hannibal said.

"Just keep it professional" Will smiled with tight lips.

"Or we could socialize like adults, God forbid we become friends"

"I don't find you that interesting"

Hannibal felt a twinge of excitement. "You will"

Will scoffed, taking another bite.

"Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters" Hannibal commented casually.

Will glared up at him, leaning back in his chair, *testing* him.

“I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field.”

“The devil is in the details,” how true, “what didn’t your copycat do to the girl in the field, what gave it away?

“Everything. It’s like he had to show me a negative so that I could see the positive. It-” Will had to breathe to compose himself, “That crime scene was practically gift wrapped”

“The mathematics of human behavior, all those ugly variables. Some bad math with this Shrike fellow, huh?” Hannibal could sense one of Will’s walls falling away, “Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?”

“Uh, he has a few.”

“You ever have any problems Will?”

“ *No* ” Will smiled with sarcasm dripping from his lips.

“Of course you don’t, you and I are just alike, problem-free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about.” Hannibal let the words hang in the air. He looked forward to what would hopefully happen next, “You know, Will, I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. The finest china used for only special guests”

Will paused, then he began to laugh, light behind his smile, as if to say ‘You read my mind’. Hannibal allowed his own smile to spread across his face, eyes lighting up at the beautiful sound. When was the last time he’d heard Will laugh? It had been far too long ago, he’d see to it that Will laughed for him more often.

“How do you see me?” Will asked, grin still on his face.

Hannibal looked up into Will’s eyes, finding that they didn’t flick away from him. *Oh Will* .

He smiled, more gently this time. “The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by. Clearly, *just* as you are”

Will’s smile faded, but not because he was upset.

“Finish your breakfast” Hannibal said sweetly.

How dreadful Hannibal thought as Will pulled into the Hobbs’ family driveway. He wasn’t looking forward to seeing Abigail’s mutilation again, but if it was what was necessary, he’d do it. Will stared at the front door of the Hobbs’ residence, hesitant.

He knows Hannibal thought, holding back his smile. *Of course he knows, clever boy.*

Will stepped out of the car, walking towards the front door, but almost stopped dead in his tracks as Mrs. Hobbs was thrown from her front door, neck slashed. Will, in a panic, rushed

to the woman, attempting to stop her bleeding. Hannibal found it especially difficult to act even concerned for the woman. She was a speck in the scheme of events, hardly as involved with Abigail as her husband was. Is. Will have been.

Will, feeling a surge of anger for this woman, drew his gun and kicked the front door open. Hannibal didn't even give the woman a passing glance, following right behind Will.

"Garrett Jacob Hobbs! FBI!" Will shouted, hearing a scream from down the hall. It was a girl's scream, the Golden Ticket.

Hannibal felt honored to witness this event, as he hadn't seen it fully the first time. He also, unfortunately, got to witness Abigail's throat being cut. Will pulled the trigger ten times, not because he had to, Hannibal knew, but because he wanted to exact his justice. The breath left Hannibal with every bullet that left Will's gun, every one of them well deserved, in Will's eyes.

Justice, delivered swiftly, although not gracefully. If this lovely image is what he can make with the barrel of a gun, he'd be thrilled to see what marvels he can create with his own two hands.

Will fell to the ground at Abigail's side, erratically trying to stop the bleeding. Hannibal was instantly next to Will, placing his hands exactly where they had to be, covering the exposed artery, and elevating her neck. Hannibal took a chance look at Will, discovering that Will was already staring at him with wide eyes. He couldn't stop the words from slipping from his tongue.

" *Beautiful boy* " he whispered.

Will blinked rapidly as Hannibal turned his head back to Abigail. He wasn't sure if he'd actually heard what he'd heard, and the neutral expression on Hannibal's face wasn't helping him decide. He too turned back to Abigail, deciding that she was far more important at that moment than whatever he'd thought Hannibal had said.

Chapter 3

She was there, alive. Surrounded by machines and IVs, yes, but *alive.* The missing piece of his family that he'd lost was here, and he wouldn't lose her again. He sat next to her hospital bed overnight and fell asleep holding her hand, waking up almost every few hours to check her pulse monitor like clockwork. The next morning, Hannibal woke again, to instead find Will sitting across from him, on the other side of Abigail's bed. His eyes were shut and his head leaned forward, snoring lightly. It seemed that they'd had similar ideas. Hannibal felt the urge to check his pulse as well -just in case- but he refrained. Will seemed to be able to sense Hannibal's staring, because after a minute of it, his eyes began to flutter. Hannibal quickly diverted his gaze to Abigail as Will woke up, but he didn't have to look away for long.

"Good morning" Will mumbled, voice scratchy.

"Good morning Will" Hannibal responded, voice equally gruff.

"Why are *you* here?"

"I felt worried," Hannibal said honestly, "although I have the utmost faith in the staff of his hospital, I couldn't help but want to be with her myself. I can imagine that you felt similar"

Will neither confirmed nor denied that, simply staring blankly at the white sheets over the girl's body.

"I shot and killed her father," he said quietly after a moment, "I did it to help her, I know that. But I feel… guilt"

Hannibal considered this. "Garret Jacob Hobbs was a present danger, you acted rationally for the situation. That being said, you have orphaned Abigail Hobbs. She will wake up without parents, without a home, and you blame yourself for that"

"I could have done something," Will said, more to himself, "there has to have been something that I could have done to make things different"

"You could have chosen not to shoot, and allowed Abigail to die. It wouldn't have been just. You must remember Will, although Abigail will wake up orphaned, she will wake up"

Will nodded slowly, looking back to Abigail's face, eyes troubled. Hannibal already knew the question he was working over in that mind of his.

Why really *did I kill Garret Jacob Hobbs?*

Abigail had been transparent from the beginning. Of course she was, she had the same look in her eyes that Will did; the look of a restrained beast. When he'd helped her to hide the body of Nicholas Boyle, she was terrified, of herself and of him.

Poor thing he'd thought. He'd fix that.

Will too was dealing with his fears, though, Abigail confronted hers differently.

"Good evening Will," Hannibal greeted the man standing in his waiting room, "Has Christmas come early or late?"

Will swallowed in the way he always did when he was uncomfortable.

"It *was* for Abigail" he murmured.

"Was?"

"I thought better of it, I wasn't thinking straight. I was upset when I bought it. Maybe still am"

Hannibal looked at the package.

"What is it?"

"A magnifying glass, fly tying gear" Will admitted it like it was a horrible, nasty secret.

Oh Will. Sentimental. Is this what you pictured giving your biological children? Perhaps our own? Abigail may not share your blood, but you both share hers. She would love this beautiful gift, if she knew just how much it all meant, and she will.

"Her father taught her to hunt, you wish to teach her to fish"

"That's why I thought better of it" Will spat.

"Feeling paternal, Will?"

Will spun, about to lash in defense, before Hannibal continued, "Fishing is personal, something comforting. Sea turtles return to their places of birth because their parents knew that the beach was safe, and passed the knowledge on to their children. You know that fishing is safe, and you wish to pass that on to Abigail, who's safe space has recently been taken from her"

Will glared at Hannibal incredulously, wanting to be angry, but not finding it in himself.

"Her safe space was hunting," he said quietly, "and her father was deeply connected to that"

"Garrett Jacob Hobbs wove himself tightly into what he taught her was safety. When he was no longer safe for Abigail, neither was hunting" Hannibal paused, looking up into Will's eyes, "Abigail is a child ready to leave the nest, she had very little of her childhood left, but it has since been torn apart. Are you looking to rebuild what her father broke? What would you change? What would remain the same?"

Will swallowed again, so Hannibal allowed him to change the subject.

Sweet, solitary, paternal Will. Why do you restrain yourself from making a family? Let yourself be encompassed, mylimasis. Let me encompass you.

Abigail sat at the dining table, dazed yet still. She stared at the breakfast-dinner in front of her with wide eyes, and she could feel herself being sucked from this dining room to her own. She was waiting obediently to begin eating, as she'd been told to wait for their other guest, though she didn't know who was coming.

Hannibal watched from the doorway of his kitchen, unblinking and silent. This time- *this* time, he'd taken Abigail later in the day, after Doctor Bloom had come to check in with her. He didn't need her interfering again. He'd had Abigail's tea ready when she arrived, and she experienced its effects just as she had before (though this time Hannibal had made sure to catch the teacup she had dropped).

A knock at the door made Hannibal's heart leap, and Abigail looked at him expectantly. Hannibal exited briskly, getting to the front door within seconds, and opening it.

"Thank you very much for coming, Will" he said with a small smile.

Will nodded shortly, stepping inside when Hannibal let him.

"Is Abigail alright?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, but I must confess that I was wrong about her"

"Oh? How so?"

"Earlier, Doctor Bloom advised me that Abigail was not ready to leave the hospital. It turns out she was right, Abigail experienced some anxiety"

Will's expression became concerned. "Is she okay? Where is she?"

"Like I said, Will, she's perfectly fine. However, I gave her a mild sedative, simply half a Valium to calm her nerves"

"You took her out of the hospital, then gave her drugs?" Will raised a brow in surprise, "You know, if Doctor Bloom heard about this, she'd pitch a fit"

"I am well aware," Hannibal said, a bit too honestly, "would you tell her about this? Especially if I were to prove to you that Abigail is alright?"

Will looked strange, before shaking his head lightly, much to Hannibal's delight. Hannibal led the man into the dining room and Abigail looked up, a bit surprised at who it was.

"Hey Will" she said, a bit airily.

"Hey," Will said gently, "are you alright, Abigail?"

Abigail nodded lightly, a light smile on her lips.

“Be warned Will, she may still be a bit hazy” Hannibal said, before gesturing to a chair, a place setting in front of it. Will swallowed, but sat down.

“Are you hungry?” Abigail asked, not really looking at Will or Hannibal, “Hannibal made breakfast for dinner”

Will chuckled lightly, nodding. “I guess I am”

Hannibal smiled brightly, though Will couldn’t see it, and he quickly brought the meal to the table. He was quiet as he served them, but he couldn’t help but stare at Will’s face. Will was focused on Abigail, but he could feel the eyes on him.

“Abigail?” Will called suddenly, “Are you okay?”

Abigail’s eyes had gone wide, looking wildly between Hannibal and Will. She said nothing, but her breathing became quicker. Hannibal smiled widely at her, placing a hand on Will’s shoulder to calm him. Abigail seemed to see through both of them, but she wasn’t afraid.

My sweet girl

“What is it Abigail?” Hannibal asked, “What do you see?”

Abigail didn’t meet his eyes, but a small smile quirked her lips.

“I see family”

Will’s eyes widened in surprise, and he looked up at Hannibal. Something shifted in Will’s eyes when he looked at Hannibal’s pleased face. There was something deeper beneath Hannibal’s wine colored eyes, and Will had seen some of it, but he wasn’t sure if he was afraid of it.

“Do you?” Hannibal asked, not looking away from Will for a moment.

Abigail nodded gently, before turning to her dinner.

“Interesting, Abigail, very interesting” Hannibal said, sitting in his own seat.

Will continued to stare at Hannibal, a warm shock behind his eyes, but he quickly looked away. The family shared their dinner quietly, and Hannibal had to force himself to resist placing a hand over Will’s closed fist.

Oh, calm yourself Will, have peace. You’re safe here, Abigail is safe here as well, you’ll be alright. We all will be. Now please, calm down, and finish your breakfast.

Chapter 4

Is it time for this already? Hannibal asked himself as he glanced over his schedule book.

‘ *F. Froidevaux* , 5 pm. *B. Dawson* , 6 pm. *W. Graham* , 7:30 pm’

Hannibal sighed, closing his office for the night, knowing exactly where Will would be. At least this time, he knew where to look first. Upon walking into Will’s office, he saw the man staring blankly off into the air in front of him. His eyes were glossy, out of focus, though he saw nothing. A few of his curls were stuck to his face, damp with sweat. His skin looked pale, feverish. Hannibal’s heart fluttered and broke all at once, knowing how Will’s health was gradually deteriorating, but still the man was somehow *so* beautiful. Hannibal stepped closer, Will’s scent strong in the air. Salty, sweet; the encephalitis. Will didn’t stir when Hannibal got closer, he didn’t even blink. Hannibal felt his resolve fading, just looking at Will.

It would do him no harm Hannibal considered to himself as he came to Will’s side and looked into his face.

Will’s eyes were still unfocused, bright green pools seeing through Hannibal entirely. Hannibal inhaled gently, sighing out a breath as he let Will consume him for a few moments. Will’s lips were pale, pink, tempting, but he couldn’t risk Will waking up to a kiss (although he could picture it vividly, and it was gorgeous. Perhaps that could come later)

“Will,” Hannibal called gently, placing a hand on Will’s shoulder. Will suddenly blinked rapidly, eyes darting about the room before finding Hannibal’s face. Hannibal’s smile was small, but there.

“I have a 24 hour cancellation policy” the man said quietly.

Will’s brow furrowed with confusion. “What time is it?”

“It’s nearly 9 o’clock”

Will felt his chest constrict slightly. It had been 6:30 only a minute ago, he could swear by it. What had happened?

“Oh, God, I’m so sorry” Will said, sitting up and rubbing the tiredness from his eyes.

“No apology necessary”

“I must’ve fallen asleep,” Will said, looking up at Hannibal. He looked lost, apprehensive, Hannibal nearly melted. “Was I sleepwalking?” Will asked.

“Your eyes were open, but you were not present”

“Geez…” Will sighed, “I felt as if I were asleep. I need to stop sleeping altogether. Best way to avoid bad dreams”

Hannibal pursed his lips, stepping back from Will’s chair. “I can see why you have bad dreams” he gestured to the desk, which was littered with the bloody crime scene photos that Will had been pouring over.

Poor dear boy, you’re looking for me. Come and find me, it won’t be difficult for you. Oh, Will.

Hannibal hadn’t noticed that Will had stood until he was suddenly closer, nearly able to feel the intense heat radiating from Will’s skin. A faint blush rose in his cheeks (when had he started doing *that?*), but he kept himself primarily composed.

“What do you see, Doctor?”

His composure was gone. He’d forgotten how much he loved when Will called him ‘doctor’. There was an admittance of power in it, and coming from Will, it was a euphoric power rush. Hannibal allowed a small gasp to leave his lungs, hoping that Will wouldn’t notice it, and he didn’t, past seeing it as a noise of consideration.

“Sum up the Ripper in so many words?” Hannibal asked.

“Choose them wisely” Will drawled. *Oh, oh dear Will. The way your voice can drip from your tongue, you’re like nectar.*

“Oh, I always do. Words are living things, they have personality, point of view, agenda”

“They’re pack hunters”

Thinking of hunting, are we, Will?

“Displaying one’s enemy after death has its appeal in many cultures” Hannibal pointed out.

“These aren’t the Ripper’s enemies, these are pests he’s swatted”

“Their reward for their cruelty” Hannibal said, looking subtly up at Will. It was one of his favorite gags, to pretend that he didn’t know the Ripper. To make wildly inaccurate claims about one of his own crime scenes and watch the FBI chase their tails, following his advice. Will had always seen past his games, always got it right.

“Oh, he doesn’t have a problem with cruelty. Their reward is for undignified behavior. These dissections are to disgrace them. It’s… It’s a public shaming”

“Takes their organs away because, in his mind, they don’t deserve them” Hannibal said, more in truth. Will seemed to recognize it.

“In some way”

“Who’s this?” Hannibal asked, lifting a photo of the girl he knew well.

“It’s Jack Crawford’s trainee. She’s not like the other victims. The Ripper had no reason to humiliate Miriam Lass”

Hannibal had visited Miriam again earlier that morning, to check on her and make sure that her arm had been healing well.

“Seems to me he was humiliating someone”

“Yeah. He was humiliating Jack”

“Did it work?”

“I’d say it worked *really* well”

Hannibal locked eyes with Will, only allowing a grin to show on his lips when he realized that Will was smirking too.

This is our dance. You take a step forward, I take a step back, vice versa. Take my hand again, let me lead us.

Hannibal spent the day worrying. In about four and a half minutes, Tobias Budge would be coming into his office to kill his patient, and he would tell him that he killed two police officers. Will had survived before, of course, but Hannibal couldn’t help but to consider the Butterfly effect. Would the outcome of Will’s encounter be different because of Hannibal’s tampering with the timeline? He didn’t worry about much, especially since he had the advantage of knowing everything that would happen, but today he *worried* .

“Nine. Nine times. I can count on two hands the number of times I’ve been dumped by a psychiatrist”

Ah yes, the task at hand, of course.

“I’m sorry, Franklyn, but I think you should see another doctor”

“You’re giving me a referral?”

Will told me Tobias Budge tried to wrap cords around his neck. I saw the wounds left on his arms from where he blocked the attack. He’ll be fast enough this time, won’t he?

“Yes, I am”

“You were a referral!”

He had to shoot Budge over his shoulder, he lost hearing in that ear temporarily. He shot too close, would he shoot closer by accident?

“I am also a part of the problem. You focus too much on your therapist, and not enough on your therapy”

Tobias Budge could very well be dead, Will may have shot him, in which case, I have nothing to worry about.

“You lost respect for me because I wouldn’t report Tobias, didn’t you?”

“Report Tobias for what?” came a voice from behind.

I suppose Tobias Budge lives, for now.

Franklyn’s face went pale at the sight of the other man.

“I came to say goodbye, Franklyn”

“What do you mean, ‘goodbye’?” Franklyn said, his voice rising, “Oh, my God. Oh my God, is that your blood?”

“I just killed three men” Tobias said plainly.

Three? Hannibal reeled, *It can’t be. I’m sure it was two last time, he killed only two, why is it now three?*

“The police came to question me about the murder”

How many police officers were with Will? Tobias Budge would have killed all the officers on the scene, so there were only two the first time.

“Okay… you have to give yourself up right now. This plane is going down. Let it have a controlled descent. We can get you back up in the air again. There’s rehabilitation for everyone”

Is Will dead? No, no I couldn’t have come so far to lose him now, not now. I barely had him, he never saw me, he never knew me. I never had him.

“Franklyn, I want you to leave now” Hannibal said, his voice barely trembling.

“Stay right where you are, Franklyn” Tobias commanded.

“You’ve done a horrible thing, and I know that you wish to God you didn’t, but you did, and there’s nothing you can do to change that. Only thing you can change is your future, right? No? You’re probably scared. You probably feel like you’re all alone”

“I’m not alone”

I have reversed time, I have traveled back years in my life to these moments, all for him. I can't lose him here. Not to this, not after everything I've done for our second chance.

“That’s right, you’re not alone. Nothing has happened in our relationship that you and I can’t-”

Hannibal snapped Franklyn's neck with swift ease, the man's body toppling to the floor in a heap. Tobias' eyes widened at the body, while Hannibal stared at him.

You take Will from me, I take Franklyn from you. The same as last time.

"I was looking forward to that" Tobias said.

"You think you were" Hannibal responded bitterly.

Tobias threw his jacket to the side, revealing the cord that had been concealed there. Hannibal nearly snarled, deciding that this time, he would take the first hit.

Is my Will dead?

The coroner closed the bag over Tobias Budge's bludgeoned face. Hannibal had reacted reasonably, defended himself, Jack would agree with that. If the man's body was a bit beaten, mutilated by accident, no one could really blame him for that, could they?

Hannibal's knuckles were turning white, gripping his knees. The pain from the wounds he'd received was nothing compared to the sheer anxiety he felt. His mind lingered on that number, *three* . It was agony, waiting silently for Jack Crawford to come in (and if the universe had any mercy left, Will right next to him).

Hannibal's heart dropped at the sight of Jack. One second passed. Another second. A third. No Will.

No, no, not him. Not him. Will is not dead, I haven't loved him, we haven't been together for nearly as long as we deserve.

Seven seconds, eight, nine, and on the tenth, Will stepped into Hannibal's office.

Every drop of blood in Hannibal's body became lighter the longer that Will was within his sight. He noticed how Will became more beautiful after he'd thought he'd never see him again. He wanted to throw himself over Will, hold him safely to his chest, comfort him, and he may have if there weren't so many other people in the room with them.

Will glanced up, eyes widening in his concern. Hannibal was bleeding, and he looked more disheveled than Will had ever seen him. His eyes were what worried Will the most. He was looking directly back at Will, eyes glossy with near devastation. Will didn't take long to get to him.

My love, my muse, my life, you are my soul, my heart. I cannot live without you, even losing the idea of you would be my own apocalypse. Oh Will, you wonderful creature, I will have you soon.

Hannibal looked up at Will, his beauty, his angel. Will looked back, witnessing only two stray tears leaving Hannibal's eyes.

“I was so worried you were dead” he nearly whimpered. Will seemed to gush affection, he nodded.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m alright, Will. I’m alright”

“Tobias Budge killed three Baltimore Police Officers, nearly killed an FBI Special Agent, and after all of that, his first stop is here, at your office”

Hannibal could have killed Jack in that moment, it was terribly rude of him to interrupt, but at least he clarified who exactly Tobias’ third victim was.

“He came to kill my patient”

“Your patient. Is that who Budge was serenading?” Will asked.

“I don’t know. Franklyn knew more than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge that he didn’t have to kill anymore. And then he broke Franklyn’s neck, and then he attacked me”

“You killed him?” Crawford raised a brow.

Hannibal hesitated. “Yes”

“Could Franklyn have been involved in whatever Budge was doing?” Will asked.

“I thought this was a simple matter of poor choice in friends”

“This doesn’t feel simple to me” Jack said, turning away.

Hannibal knew that he’d slid under Jack’s radar, but he still felt a bit of pressure leave his chest. Will suddenly sat down on his desk next to him. His presence was comforting, relaxing, Hannibal felt the temptation to lay his head on Will’s thigh.

“I feel like I’ve… dragged you into my world” Will said apologetically. Hannibal smiled up at him, love seeping from every pore of him.

“Oh, dear Will, I got here on my own. But I enjoy your company, thank you”

Chapter 5

"Abigail Hobbs killed Nick Boyle"

Hannibal looked up at Will, who had just entered his office. Abigail had dug him up, he knew. He wasn't angry with her, children often make mistakes, but right now, Will was what he needed to focus on. There was an expression of mild anger on the man's face as he stared Hannibal down. This situation had been delicate before and it still was, especially now.

"Yes, I know" Hannibal responded.

Will nodded. "Tell me why you know?" he asked, the twinge in his voice showing his betrayal.

"I helped her dispose of the body"

"Evidently, not well enough" Will hissed, turning away from Hannibal.

Hannibal stood, taking a few steps toward Will. "Have you told Jack Crawford?" he asked.

"No"

"Why not?"

"Because I was *hoping* it wasn't true"

"Well… now you know the truth"

"Do I?"

"Everything you know about that night is true, except the end. Nicholas Boyle attacked us. Abigail's only crime was to defend herself, and I lied about it"

"Why?"

Hannibal grimaced. "You know why. Because Jack Crawford would hang her for what her father's done, and the world would burn Abigail in his place. That would be the story," Hannibal could see Will's conflict plainly on his face, as the man began to pace back and forth, "That would be what Freddie Lounds writes. Abigail is no more a killer than you are for shooting her father, or I am for the death of Tobias Budge"

"It isn't our place to decide!" Will snapped.

"If not ours, then whose?" Hannibal questioned, taking a few more strides in Will's direction.

Personal space hadn't ever meant much to them, and especially not during a family crisis. The urge to wrap his arm around Will's waist to comfort him was strong, he wasn't entirely sure how he resisted it.

Perhaps I am better at self restraint than I give myself credit for.

"Who knows Abigail, and the burden she bears, better than you and I? We are her fathers now, Will, we have to serve her better than Garrett Jacob Hobbs"

Will didn't look at Hannibal, and he didn't respond.

"If we go to Jack, then we murder Abigail's future"

Will's frown deepened as Hannibal stepped ever closer.

"Are we going to Jack, Will?" he asked softly.

Will turned, looking at Hannibal, which was a mistake. The moment he met Hannibal's eyes, he was decided.

"No, Hannibal. No" he whispered. Hannibal smiled gently, before he allowed it to fade.

"We can tell no one"

Will's confliction was increasing, it made Hannibal's heart tug. He placed one hand on Will's shoulder, and the other on his opposite arm. It was as close to an embrace as he could give, for now.

I wish I could truly comfort you, Will. I wish I could alleviate your burden, give you peace of mind.

"You're a good man, Will. You're doing the best thing for Abigail. I know this kind of thing can eat you from the inside, if you let it. In time, that guilt can all go away, because Abigail will be safe" Hannibal said softly.

Will sighed, brow furrowed, his eyes closed. "I'm somehow not so convinced"

"Then allow me to convince you," Hannibal replied, "that this is not something that you should feel guilty for. You are doing what's best for Abigail"

"I'm a terrible FBI agent" Will mumbled sarcastically, to which Hannibal chuckled.

"Maybe so, but you're a good father"

This startled Will, making him give Hannibal a weird look. He considered Hannibal's words, rolled them over in his head, before allowing their message a place in his mind.

"I'd like you to draw a clock face. Numbered. Large hand indicating the hour, small hand the minute" Hannibal said, handing Will a pen and notepad.

"Why?" Will asked.

Hannibal looked at him for a moment. He saw a brief image of Will standing in his dining room, glistening with sweat, skin a sickly olive color, looking at him with tears in his eyes and begging *"Please don't lie to me!"*

Hannibal saw him convulsing, his eyes rolling back into his head as he lost himself to his illness. And he'd comforted him after he woke up, wiped the sweat from his brow, brushed his hair from his face, took care of him. He couldn't help but feel that his life was *supposed* to be spent taking care of Will.

But not that way, and not yet.

"I'm concerned that your problem is neurological. This is a simple test for cognitive impairment in the form of spatial neglect"

Will swallowed heavily. He'd thought that he had some kind of illness, but the idea of it being confirmed made him anxious as he drew a circle, the numbers around the edge, and the hands pointing to the time.

"It's 7:16 pm, I'm in Baltimore Maryland, and my name is Will Graham"

"Thank you Will" Hannibal said, as he took the notepad back, knowing already what the clock looked like. He could briefly recall inserting a long tube down Will's throat, then Abigail's severed ear, and he grimaced.

Not ever again .

The clock was ovular in shape, half of the numbers not even within it. His brow furrowed.

"What? What is it?" Will asked.

"Will, I'd like to take you to see a friend of mine, a neurologist, to do a brain scan. I don't believe there is any irreparable damage," Hannibal clarified when he saw that Will had gone a bit pale, "but we need to know how to treat you"

Will nodded gently, swallowing again. Hannibal wanted to caress him, calm him, do something other than what was considered 'professional', but Will wasn't ready.

"Encephalitis?" Will asked.

"Yes, almost certainly," Dr Sutcliffe answered, "from what we saw on the brain scan, combined with the knowledge of your symptoms, you likely caught some sort of virus that caused the inflammation"

"I would start Will on antibiotics as soon as we can," Hannibal said, "from what I saw on the scan, it would be dangerous to allow symptoms to progress"

"I can start you on some basic antibiotics while we run some blood tests and find out exactly what virus we're dealing with here" Sutcliffe told Will.

Will took a deep breath and swallowed uncomfortably, but Sutcliffe smiled.

"It's good that we caught this before your symptoms worsened further. With the work you do, this could have had drastic effects on your mental health"

Will nodded slightly, looking over at Hannibal, who gave him a comforting look. There was something lighter in Will's chest, and he felt as though he could finally breathe for the first time in months.

Hannibal could breathe easier knowing that he would never let his beloved crumble at his own hands and, if things continued this way, he wouldn't have to hear him say 'Goodbye Hannibal' ever again.

Chapter 6

Hannibal checked in with Will often, making sure that the antibiotics were doing their job, and day by day, Will got better.

"It's been a week since I last sleepwalked. I kind of don't want to say it out loud, in case I jinx it" Will chuckled, pacing around his chair.

Hannibal smiled vaguely up at him from his chair, eyes not leaving Will once. Will's health was evident in the way he talked, in his scent. The smell of sickness was still there, but fading slowly as the virus seemed to be dying.

"Your health has been improving, as well as your mood" Hannibal remarked.

"What, I'm less irritable now that my brain isn't frying?"

"Yes, perhaps that's part of it"

Will chuckled. "Yeah, something like that"

"Any more hallucinations? Nightmares?" Hannibal asked.

"Nightmares, yes. Hallucinations are all auditory, but I've stopped seeing things"

"Things such as a stag? As Garrett Jacob Hobbs?"

Will nodded.

"Perhaps this can also be seen as something else. Alongside your physical recovery, you may be having a psychological recovery"

"Elaborate?"

"You no longer see Garrett Jacob Hobbs, nor any of your other victims, in the shadows of your minds. They are no longer there to demand your guilt, taking a toll on your mind. You might see this as forgiving yourself"

Will looked at Hannibal strangely, before clarifying, "I don't consider Garrett Jacob Hobbs, or anyone else, a victim"

"And yet, you guilted yourself for their deaths"

"I have guilt for the innocents I couldn't save, that I was too late to save"

"But for Garrett Jacob Hobbs?" Hannibal asked, "He was far from innocent. Do you feel guilt for his killing?"

Will took a solid moment to respond, before shaking his head. "No, he… he had to die"

"But you don't feel the necessity of it, do you, Will? You believe yourself to have done it purely because of the situation, but is that entirely true?"

Hannibal watched Will's body language carefully. Will's expression went a bit lost, going back into his mind. Hannibal put a gentle hand on Will's arm, beckoning him back out of his fortress. Will's expression changed, eyes welling slightly as he trembled. Will didn't dare look up at Hannibal, his shame not permitting even a glance at the man's face.

"I liked killing Hobbs because he… I thought he deserved to die"

"And you deserved to be the one to kill him" Hannibal said quietly.

Will shuddered, squeezing his eyes shut.

"I understood him, I knew why he killed those girls, why he almost killed Abigail, and it… it was sick. Those girls didn't deserve it, Abigail didn't deserve it"

"He killed the innocent for selfish reasons"

"He loved Abigail to the point of obsession, and he let that obsession hurt his own child!"

Will was startled by his own outburst, but Hannibal remained unfazed. "You found that monstrous, repulsive. It wasn't fair, and you wanted justice for the victims"

Will bit his tongue, simply nodding his head. Hannibal went quiet, placing his free hand on Will's other arm, holding him like that for a few quiet moments. Hannibal felt as though time stood still, he could hold Will just like this for eternity, even though the embrace wasn't very intimate. Just touching Will's arms was enough to sate his hunger for him, for now. It was Will that broke the silence.

"This isn't the encephalitis" he said quietly.

"No, Will, it is not. It is your own mind" Hannibal said.

Will furrowed his brow. "Is this mental illness? Psychological trauma? God, am I taking these killers in too deep?"

"I never said anything about this being something abnormal, Will. This is not illness, this is your own beautiful mind"

Will looked at Hannibal as if he'd sprouted horns, alarmed at his words, but Hannibal wasn't finished.

"You dealt justice to Garrett Jacob Hobbs for his crimes, and it felt good because he deserved that. However, all these killers that you've had locked away, did you feel that satisfaction?"

Will shook his head.

"Of course not. You felt that they deserved more than what they got, that prison didn't give the victims any peace, or justice. It's how you've always seen these killers, yes?"

Will nodded, tears welling again. Hannibal wished he could press Will into his chest and hold him there, comfort him until he had no more tears left. He couldn't see his own beauty yet, but he would eventually, Hannibal would see to it. Will looked at the floor as Hannibal gave his arms a squeeze.

"You do not need to be ashamed of this Will, especially not with me. We have very similar views on justice, you'll find"

Will looked at Hannibal strangely again. It was like something clicked together in his brain, and his eyes glistened brightly with the discovery.

"You deserve your own forgiveness, Will" Hannibal concluded.

The way he looked at Hannibal began to change, and he nodded his head as Hannibal released him from his grip. Something about him was warmer, softer, and Will didn't know what to think of it just yet.

Knowing the day that Abel Gideon would kidnap Frederick Chilton was perfect for Hannibal's purposes.

He'd waited in the shadows of the trees outside of Alana's house, knowing that Gideon would show up. Sure enough, just as he was last time, though several hours earlier, he was there. He was staring at Alana through the window, with the madness of a man that had tried to understand Hannibal.

Someone who can't understand me, but forced to.

Hannibal shot him in the back, not staying long enough to watch him fall to the ground before hiking back through the trees to his car, and returning to his own home, just where he was supposed to be that night. Alana didn't see him, no one did, too busy rushing over to the fallen doctor.

Gideon was hospitalized, as was Frederick Chilton, and Hannibal almost smiled at that. That was going well, for him, and it was another step closer to that piece of his puzzle.

Will isn't ready yet, but he must be soon.

Hannibal knew early on that changing the timeline the way he did wouldn't come without its consequences. He'd known virtually everything that was to happen up until the moment Will began taking treatment. Now he was unsure of what would happen next, what he would do.

Perhaps I have spoiled myself with the knowledge of every coming event, it will be difficult going back to reacting appropriately to new scenarios.

Will continued his work for the FBI, a new killer nearly each week it seemed, and while the encephalitis wasn't killing him, his thoughts were.

"I can feel eyes on my back" Will told him during a session, eyes focused on the floor.

"Whose?"

"Jack's. The FBI's. Yours"

"Mine?" Hannibal questioned, "How do you feel my eyes upon your back, Will?"

"Oh, it's a uh… a hard stare. One of those stares you give, when you're figuring me out"

Hannibal chuckled, "Oh, I see. You feel my analysis"

"I feel studied. I feel like I'm the guinea pig for nothing"

"I would like to note, Will, I do not study you for the FBI. Although my behavior can be analytical, I merely wish to understand you, so I may better help you"

"I know that," Will sighed, running his hand through his hair, "and you do. I think. But I can't help feeling that at some point I'm going to come off as unstable"

"To whom? To Jack? Myself?"

"To everyone. I always have come off like that, in a way. To most people, no one should do what I do and be completely fine"

"To be fair, Will, you *were* unstable due to your illness"

"Yeah, if only that's all it was"

"Clarify this for me, Will," Hannibal leaned forward, Will never leaving his sight, "do you feel unstable, or do you feel that you are perceived that way?"

"A little of both?" Will mumbled, pacing the room, "I don't feel unstable but I- I must be"

"Why must you be, Will?"

"Because these thoughts of… of Hobbs, and these other killers. They haven't gone away. I still feel… I still feel good about what I've done"

"Who's to say those thoughts aren't stable?"

"It's more worrying if they are. It could be mental illness, it could be hyperfixation…"

"Or perhaps it is just your own sense of justice"

"Justice shouldn't call for murder"

"Shouldn't it? What's more fitting to punish a killer than killing him?"

Will breathed out a sigh. Hannibal gently smiled at him, though he didn't see.

"If Garrett Jacob Hobbs were behind bars now, if he were alive, would you have this satisfaction?" he asked, pausing to look Will up and down, "Or would you wish, deep down,

that he'd gotten true justice at your hands?"

Will fell quiet, looking away from Hannibal and off into the distance. He had his look of conflict again, fighting with himself.

"I'd lie awake," he began softly, "wondering what it would have been like"

"Have you done so before?" Hannibal asked gently.

"When I was a cop. I couldn't pull the trigger, I was terrified. The guy almost got away, and for weeks I couldn't help but wish I had taken the shot"

"And why was that?"

"I used to think it was because he'd almost gotten away, and it resulted in my injury. But I was curious. About how it felt"

Hannibal nodded, masking his own pride in Will's admission. He stood, taking a few steps towards Will, who looked up at him with pleading eyes. *Please, please, I'm sorry. Don't change your mind about me.*

Hannibal merely put his hand gently on Will's shoulder, absently rubbing the tensed muscle there.

"I understand completely, Will"

Will breathed out a light sigh of relief. He allowed himself to lean slightly into Hannibal's touch, smiling in thanks, eyes flicking up to Hannibal's briefly before looking back to the floor. Hannibal smiled, not releasing Will from his hold.

I understand you more than you're ready to know, Will. You're so close to accepting yourself for what you are, but you aren't ready to know me yet.

Chapter 7

"Jack Crawford is going to arrest Abigail"

Will’s eyes widened as he did a double take. His stomach dropped as he forgot exactly how to breathe.

"Arrest her?" he asked quietly, "How do you know? Why?"

Hannibal took a deep breath, portraying his concern well.

"He revealed to me that on all of the dates that the Shrike took his victims, Abigail and her father had arranged to meet. The times matched, the locations matched. She was there every time. He believes she lured the girls. And he believes that she's Copycat you've been searching for"

In truth, Jack Crawford would only draw that conclusion tomorrow morning at 9 a.m, and he would tell neither Will or Hannibal, but he knew he had to tell Will now for Abigail to have a chance.

Will gasped quietly, boring into Hannibal's eyes with his own. There was a blend of fear and betrayal in Will's green pools, he looked to Hannibal for relief.

"Why didn't Crawford tell me?" Will asked after a moment had passed.

"He is afraid that you have become too attached to Abigail, that you'd react in her defense"

The room spun around Will, several realizations hitting him at once.

"Abigail Hobbs… helped kill those girls"

"I believe so"

"But she's… she's *not* the Copycat!" Will protested.

"I don't believe that either" Hannibal agreed, standing to meet Will's eye.

Will seemed to calm at the closer proximity, but he couldn’t calm completely.

"She lured those innocent girls to their deaths"

"She did, but I doubt that it's as simple as her taking after her father. You know Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Will, and we both know Abigail. She is not obsessive as her father was"

Not to mention she's far too clever to kill in the situation she's in.

"What can I do?" Will asked quietly, "She participated in the killing of eight innocent girls that she knew! She may as well have killed them herself!"

"Speak with her, Will. You knew her father, and you know her, but you don't know this side of her yet. You don't have her entirety. You cannot judge her like you judged Garrett Jacob Hobbs"

The last sentence was a blow to Will, forcing him to look up at Hannibal with shocked tears in his eyes. He could feel his perception of his Abigail changing, but now he wasn't sure how he was supposed to see her. She was a blur of the girl he'd seen as her father's victim, and the other half of the Minnesota Shrike, but Hannibal was right. Pieces of her were still missing from his knowledge.

"What about Crawford?" Will asked.

"He's getting a warrant for her arrest, he'll likely have it in the morning, and have her in custody in the afternoon" Hannibal said gravely.

"I have to talk to Abigail before then"

"Go to her in the morning, speak with her in private, prepare her for what Jack Crawford is going to do with her"

Hannibal's hand found Will's upper back, pressing against him firmly. Safe, supportive. Will sighed, the stress fading at the touch. In the back of his mind, he truly wanted closer contact, perhaps not over his jacket.

Abigail had gotten Hannibal's message three days previous, it had terrified her tremendously. He'd left it tucked into her favorite book.

"Leave the hospital on the ninth, at 9:10 p.m. Go back to your home, take the bus there. Wear your blue sweater, there is more than enough money in its pocket to get you there. Take this note and nothing else with you"

Hannibal hadn't signed it, but Abigail knew, and she had done exactly as he told her. She took nothing with her, and hopped on the first bus to Minnesota.

She waited in her kitchen, silently, wondering what she was supposed to do next, when Hannibal finally came in. Tears swelled up in Abigail's eyes, and she got up immediately to hug him, which he allowed.

My poor dear Abigail. You're a frightened cub, abused, betrayed. You don't have to fear this world forever.

He held her tightly, gently petting her hair as he soothed her tears.

"Jack Crawford knows everything, Abigail," he said softly, "that's why I had to come here, to keep you safe"

"If I run, they'll catch me, won't they? You can't protect me anymore"

"If they find you, they will arrest you, yes"

Abigail sobbed at that.

Hannibal held her for another moment, allowing her to calm before he spoke again.

"Will knows everything now as well"

Abigail's thoughts stilled, her whole body tensing for the worst, most crushing blow.

"What does he think of me?"

Hannibal breathed out slowly. "He wants to know you. Protect you, if he can. He wants to talk to you, understand"

"Is he here?"

"No, it's just us, ma cherie"

Abigail sniffed, backing away from Hannibal to dry her eyes and breathe.

"Abigail, you do know that Will and I both care about you deeply, don't you?" Hannibal asked.

Abigail only nodded, not lifting her gaze from the floor.

"Then you understand that I would do anything to protect you from this. Will and I both would"

Abigail nodded again.

"Abigail, I cannot protect you here anymore, unless I were to take you from this world completely, and I will not do that," Hannibal avoided using the word 'again', "but I can take you away from here. It's what I've been working towards"

Abigail felt that sentence was strange, and she looked up to ask what Hannibal had meant, but she saw it before she could speak. It was a certain look of admission, the smallest amount of guilt. Her father had it that last morning.

"Hannibal. Why did you really call the house?"

Hannibal had to take a deep breath to center himself. Abigail had always been a bit afraid of him when she'd begun living with him, he'd always hoped that he'd have a chance to change that until her passing.

This time, I can keep Abigail's trust, and give her the family I promised her. Her bond with Will hasn't been broken, nor her bond with me.

"I warned your father that Will was coming for him"

"Why?" Abigail said with a shudder, shrinking away. Hannibal didn't allow it, putting hands gently on her arms, and looking her in the eyes.

"Because Will's sense of justice needed to be put to use. If I hadn't warned your father, you both would have gone to jail, and that would be the end of it. No justice for you, or the other victims. Will punished him, your father never took the only life that he truly wanted; yours. A poetic justice"

Abigail swallowed, nodding.

"Marissa Schurr died to get you and Will out of here safely. Nicholas Boyle died to change you"

Abigail was beyond spun. "You *wanted* me to kill Nick Boyle"

"I had hoped. He changed you, Abigail. Your outlook, your views, your self image. That- *you* were so much more important than the life he clamored after"

Abigail was silent, as Hannibal's horrifying words were carried by a gentle tone.

"How many people have you killed?" she asked.

"More than your father," Hannibal said, brushing a lock of hair behind Abigail's left ear, "but you can trust that I will never hurt you, Abigail. I told you that I will protect you, and I *will* be true to my word"

Chapter 8

The hospital reported that Abigail had run off when Will came to speak with her the next morning, and when Jack Crawford came to collect her in the afternoon he immediately demanded a search for the girl.

Within an hour, Jimmy pulled bus security footage and found that Abigail had gone the whole way to Minnesota. Jack sent a team to her house, and they reported back with the grim news. Jack requested that Will stay home for this case, his relationship with Abigail was too personal. Will demanded that he have the right to help, especially when he'd been the one to break the news to Hannibal. The psychiatrist was so devastated he didn't have the words to express it. He could only allow Will to watch a few tears fall from his eyes.

Will *needed* to be involved with Abigail's case, for his and Hannibal's sake.

When Will got to the house, he was greeted by a kitchen covered in blood. He'd seen it like this before.

"All the blood belongs to Abigail Hobbs," Price said, not looking in Will's direction, worried about what he'd see, "the spray pattern is consistent with a severed jugular. From the looks of it, uh, her throat would have been cut, but she never hit the ground. Whoever did this never let her fall, they carried her out of here"

"No fingerprints? Hair strands? Blood?" Will asked.

"None that we found," Beverly said gravely, "who could have done this? Who would have known that she'd be here?"

"Maybe she was spotted by a neighbor or someone who knew her," Zeller suggested, "Nicholas Boyle came after her because his sister was a victim, maybe someone else had a similar idea and followed her here"

Will looked around the kitchen as the others talked, trying to get into the mind of the killer here. It was easy, he'd seen him somewhere else before, in other people's blood, in basements, in parking lots, in forests and *everywhere* .

"This is so familiar," Will said, transfixed by the room and its setting. Everything gutted from the room, it was completely empty, except for the blood, "he's killed before. He's killed many before, but none like this, this is so basic, it's foreign to him. *Static* "

"This is a serial killer?" Jack asked.

"Yes. Yes, but this is the first time he's killed like this. He kills for aesthetics, for art, beauty in death and justice, but this- this was so simple. Just a slashed throat, he killed her quick and he didn't humiliate her, she needed to die"

Will looked at Jack until he began to understand, though he didn't believe what he was realizing.

"You think this was the Ripper?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes. This is so similar to Miriam Lass… but so different, all the same"

"Why would the Ripper follow Hobbs all the way up here?" Beverly asked.

"He needed to kill her. She isn't on display, so she knew something, or her arrest would lead us to something. He knew where she was going, and when, he coerced her to come here. Then he… he killed her"

The room fell silent, attention on Jack, and whatever decision he'd make. The man himself was silent as well, lost in thought, staring at Will. He looked for any sort of uncertainty in the man's face, but there was none.

"We'll put out a missing person's report throughout the state with Hobbs' description. We'll keep some hope, but it's likely we're looking for a body"

Will felt a piece of his heart break, trying to fight the realization that little Abigail was likely dead and gone. She had died terrified, alone. She was a sweet girl, she was so young. He looked around the room and felt her in the walls, the floor, the air. He promised her that he'd catch the Ripper, make him pay with his life for her death.

Hannibal wasn't worried when Will rescheduled their session, he figured he would want some time alone to process. When he rescheduled again, Hannibal allowed it, not wanting Will to rush himself, it wouldn't be fair to either of them. The third reschedule was when enough was enough. Perhaps it was outside of professional boundaries to visit Will in his classroom, but what was Hannibal supposed to do? He couldn't allow Will to go on avoiding him.

He waited until Will's class was over to enter, so as not to distract the teacher. Will had just begun cleaning up his desk as the students filed out, but he seemed to sense as Hannibal stepped closer that he was being seen. He didn't turn around completely, only looking to make sure it was who he thought before he turned away again.

Hannibal didn't speak, wanting to see Will's headspace first. Will waited until the last student exited the class, then a few more moments.

"What are you doing here?" he asked quietly.

"I don't want to be rude, or overstep my boundaries as your therapist, but I don't want you to force yourself to deal with this all alone" Hannibal said simply.

"I'm not"

"Will, I've known you long enough to know when you're hiding something"

"And just what am I hiding?" Will snapped.

He finally turned around to look at Hannibal. His mind was closed, fortresses up. This was not really Will, this was his person suit. Hannibal could rid him of it, though he couldn’t force himself to be gentle as he went.

"Your grief, your pain. You hide it from Jack Crawford, from your students, you try to hide it from me, but you can't. I'm here to help you process these emotions, I *want* to help you"

"Why, because you're my therapist?"

"Will, I am not working. We have left my office, I am receiving no payment, nor would I want to be. I am no longer speaking as your therapist, I am speaking as your friend. I am worried about you" Hannibal said, strictly, slightly louder than the soft tone he normally used with Will. Will seemed to pay attention to that, looking up into Hannibal's eyes, focused on him entirely.

"Why didn't you come to me?" Hannibal asked, more gently now.

Will swallowed, sighing. "You can't pretend that you feel nothing about Abigail"

Hannibal sighed, looking to the floor, and relaxing his shoulders.

"You're right, I can't," he said, "I can't help you deal with this as a professional, my relationship with Abigail was too personal. But often, it can be mutually beneficial to share grief between friends"

Will nodded slowly, falling still and silent. "The Ripper took her. It was him"

"Abigail was not displayed"

"He had nothing against her, she was a necessity"

"What does your sense of morality say to her death?"

"I don't *know* ," Will hissed, "I don't know. What did she do to those girls? Why did she do it? Why did the Ripper need her dead?"

Hannibal paused. "You can't know if it was just if you don't know the crime"

"Are you saying I think she *deserved* to die?" Will asked in offense.

"I'm saying that your sense of justice cannot determine what is right without all the pieces. Typically, you know the crime before the killer, and from that you can determine a suitable punishment. However in this situation, you've seen the punishment first, and you don't know the crime. Was her death a deserved punishment, or an unjust crime against her?"

Will didn't speak, appalled at Hannibal's words, and just how right they were. Every bone in him told him that Abigail was innocent, but he couldn't be sure.

Hannibal stepped closer, resting a gentle hand on Will's arm. Will allowed the touch to ground him in his thoughts, and he breathed. Hannibal smiled, though it went unseen, and

they stood together, Will in his grief, Hannibal in absolute captivation.

He stared at Will, whose eyes were resting. He couldn't help but allow his gaze to slide down Will's arms to his fingertips, calloused from years of hard work, yet gentle with everything that required such care.

How would those hands hold another person?

He followed the curve of Will's back, his waist, his hips, how they shaped Will just so. He had a delicate feminine beauty to him, though he would never admit it, Hannibal doubted. His calloused heart was a compliment to his soft features, they were completely opposite, but it simply made Will that much more delectable.

Ah, Will, you could never see your beauty on your own, even others cannot seem to see it. It is a crime that the finest art pieces go so misunderstood. My dear, you belong to elegance as much as you belong to ferocity.

Hannibal was taken briefly from his admiration by the sight of a few stray tears falling across Will's cheek. He felt his heart twist, seeing such grand vulnerability in so few teardrops, and he wiped them away with his thumb. Will leaned into the small touch, allowing a few more tears to fall from his eyes as he felt his walls and posture caving.

Out of instinct, Hannibal's arm quickly traveled around Will's shoulders, holding him tightly as Will let himself crack and shatter. What Hannibal felt was next to euphoric, as he silently watched Will lean into his arms, into his comfort. Will began to cry freely, but the tears weren't just for Abigail. They were for his own pain and fear that he'd held for far too long. How long had it been since last he allowed himself to feel afraid?

Oh Will. This is your becoming, this was how it was supposed to be all this time. You're finally allowing yourself your thoughts, your sense of right and wrong. And punishment. You will not grieve for long, my dear. I will help you to see that you have nothing to grieve, and all to rejoice.

Chapter 9

Hannibal had never truly liked Frederick Chilton. He was one of those people that was friendly to those he perceived to be above him, but flipped his attitude to those below. It was undignified, especially since Hannibal had always been one of those that Frederick kissed up to, and it was almost worth rolling his eyes over. All the same, it was good to hear that Frederick had recovered from his disemboweling with minimal complication. It meant he could move forward with his plan in abducting Abel Gideon from the hospital. He planned to serve the man to himself again, mainly, but some meals he'd save for Will.

Ah, yes, Will. In my thoughts again.

Will had been taking Abigail's death especially hard. He'd been coming to sessions, but the knowledge that Abigail was gone weighed him down so much that he barely had energy left to speak at the end of his day. Hannibal tried desperately to relieve him of his burden, but Will refused to let himself rest until he caught Abigail's killer.

His becoming would never have been easy, no matter what I could have done for him. I can only hope it doesn't destroy him completely, my poor Will. But I have no time to think about this now, I must continue.

He had these thoughts as he left Miriam Lass in the bottom of an old well, Frederick Chilton's voice ringing in her ears, visage staining the back of her eyelids.

It's a good thing Will and Jack found her before she could get too uncomfortable, I would hate for her to catch something on top of everything else.

Will visited Hannibal at his home the following evening, and the cannibal was surprised and delighted that he'd be having Will for dinner that night.

"Venison steaks, served with acorns and sliced cherries, and a savory sauce" Hannibal said as he served Will his plate. Will quietly thanked him, then looked downward.

"Jack thinks that Miriam will lead us to the Chesapeake Ripper" he said, as Hannibal sat across from him.

"How does that make you feel Will?" Hannibal asked.

"Are we in therapy now, doctor?" Will retorted, not looking up from his plate.

"I'm simply curious. I feel that Jack could be correct, since Miriam is the only one of the Ripper's victims that has survived him. I wanted to hear your feelings, knowing your theory that the Chesapeake Ripper is the Copycat. If you catch him, you catch Abigail's killer"

Will nodded solemnly as he took a bite.

"Tell me, what will you do with the Chesapeake Ripper, once you catch him?" Hannibal asked.

"He'll be arrested, tried. He wouldn't lie, he'd plead guilty. Likely get the death penalty" Will replied shortly.

Hannibal chuckled a bit. "Now, what do you *want* to do with him?"

"I want to talk to him. Talk about Abigail. Understand him" Will said, after a pause.

"And then?" Hannibal asked.

Will looked up at Hannibal's mouth as he spoke, before looking up to his eyes. Their stares locked, and for a moment, Hannibal felt as if Will had taken hold of him. Will was in control, for the briefest time, and Hannibal could do nothing but hold his gaze.

"I want to kill him. He should be displayed as he displayed his victims. Beheaded. It was how Marie Antoinette was humiliated and punished for her love of beauty, it feels fitting for the Ripper,"

A shuddered breath left Hannibal's lips as Will paused, before continuing, "of course, I wouldn't be killing him for his love of beauty, it would be his abandonment of it in the face of Abigail Hobbs"

"The abandonment of beauty for necessity. Was Abigail beautiful, Will?"

Will swallowed. "She could have been. She never had a chance. That's the Ripper's truest crime. He took away the potential for beauty in Abigail, he betrayed his own ideology, in a way"

"The Ripper did not kill Miriam Lass, though her disappearance was essential to him. Perhaps there is hope for Abigail after all"

Will clenched his fork in his hand and locked his jaw. Something shifted, perhaps the plates of the Earth, perhaps something even deeper.

"They didn't find pools of Miriam Lass' blood. He didn't display her arm until years after he kidnapped her. Even if Abigail could be alive, God knows how long it will be before we find even a trace of her. Or what trace that will be," Will said grimly, "No, I want the Ripper dead for whatever he did with Abigail. I want him punished, humiliated. If there's a way I can hurt him -if there's anything the Chesapeake Ripper loves- I want to *find it* "

Hannibal found himself unable to inhale until Will looked back down to his plate. Hannibal felt that he'd suddenly been pulled from a deep sleep, as if he'd been bound to Will's enchanting green eyes. He gasped quietly to himself, allowing himself to feel the after effects of Will's spell; a peaceful, weightless euphoria.

"If there's anything the Chesapeake Ripper loves, I want to find it". Oh, Will, he's right in front of you in the morning, when you look into your mirror. You've utilized that method of hurting me before, I only wish you won't do it again.

After a moment, he came down from the high, still staring at Will. He smiled gently, simply because he was truly happy.

"That's beautiful, Will"

Will didn't look up, so as not to bewitch his partner once more, but he smiled sweetly at his food, taking another bite of his venison. In truth, their mutual friend Abel Gideon had provided their meal that night, but Hannibal suddenly found himself less fussy about the smaller details.

Chapter 10

Hannibal felt bad for Randall Tier. The boy had such beauty inside him, and his first kill had allowed it to truly blossom for the first time. He was an animal, through and through, and he knew that now, which was why it would be such a shame that he'd have to die at Will's hands.

Hannibal wasn't going to send Randall after Will again, of course not, he couldn't risk anything happening to him now, but he knew how to set Will on the path to strike first. With the way that Abel Gideon was faring, Will needed to be ready soon.

I know you won't disappoint me, my love, Hannibal thought as he drove, Will in the passenger seat of his Bentley. *You're so close to knowing me, seeing me. Please, see me.*

"How was Randall Tier as a patient?" Will asked suddenly.

Hannibal had asked to accompany Will to the museum to interview Randall Tier, to create a proper profile based off of Hannibal's knowledge of his psyche. Jack had allowed it, since the pair had made such a good team in the past, so there they were, on their way to Randall's work.

"He was a shy boy," Hannibal answered, "introverted, skittish. He believed himself to be an animal born in the body of a man. These ideas used to scare him"

"Maybe they don't scare him anymore" Will said, tone grim.

"It's possible that he's embraced his instincts, began hunting his prey. Built a body that matched his mind," Hannibal paused, looking at his partner before asking, "what do you think of it?"

"I think it would be… poetic, in a way. He wanted to be a beast, so he became a beast. And now he's being hunted like one"

"Are you the hunter, Will, or a territorial beast?"

Will didn't answer aloud as they pulled up to the museum parking lot, the sun had begun to set. The halls were bathed in red of the bleeding, dying light.

"Hello Randall" Hannibal greeted first.

"Doctor Lecter," Randall said, shocked, "it's been years"

"Yes, I last saw you when you were just a boy. Now you're a man, you're changed" Hannibal smiled, a twinkle in his eye.

Randall seemed to pick up on his message, and nodded shyly before noticing Will.

"Randall, this is my good friend Will Graham, he's a consultant with the FBI" Hannibal introduced Will, who stared dead ahead at Randall.

Randall picked up on Will's thoughts, and smiled nervously, going to shake his hand. Will took it politely, but said nothing.

"FBI?" Randall asked curiously, "Am I being investigated?"

"Not necessarily," Hannibal said, allowing Will to silently look around the room, "we simply need your help. I recall your fascination with teeth, and it seems that your passion has continued to lead your life"

Randall chuckled quietly, looking around at the various skulls of extinct carnivores.

"'You will always be ruled by your fascination with teeth'. That's what you said to me when they brought me in your office, the very first time," he said, "and you were right"

"I am not here to see if I was right about you, Randall, Will and I are here because it seems that someone has used the skull of a cave bear to commit a murder"

"Prehistoric jaws and claws are designed to do what they do best"

"To tear a victim to shreds?" Will suddenly piped up from where he examined the depiction of a cave bear on the wall. He turned and looked back at Randall with cruel clarity. "Or would you prefer the term 'prey'?"

Randall's eyes shifted, looking between Hannibal and Will.

"Doctor Lecter, is that why you're here?" he asked, "you think I could have done this?"

"I think you could have, you have the ability. Would you? I cannot answer that. I can only say that you fit the profile of our killer, even if you aren't him, you know what it's like to feel like an animal"

"Do you know what it's like when the skin you're wearing doesn't fit?"

"I can imagine" Will said bitterly.

Randall swallowed, not having to look to know that Will was staring at him. "Look, I'm better than I was when I was last in your office, doctor. I had an identity disorder. I take my medication, I'm socializing, I know who I am now"

"I'm sure you do" Will said, making Hannibal smile the smallest bit.

"I believe you, Randall," Hannibal said, "so I only ask if you would help us build our profile, perhaps tell us where someone could get this kind of skull?"

Randall paused a moment before nodding silently. After a few more minutes of talking (Will staying primarily silent, while Hannibal discussed everything with Randall), Hannibal and Will left with a courteous goodbye, allowing Randall to return to the employees only section

and continue his work. Will was quiet as they walked through the darkened parking lot, though Hannibal waited for him to speak, he didn't until they got back into the Bentley.

Hannibal silently studied Will's face, trying to read his expression. The man's eyes were closed, the small frown on his lips acting as Hannibal's only clue to his thoughts.

"What did you see, Will?" he asked gently.

Will's eyes opened as if he'd just remembered where he was, and he looked over to Hannibal quickly. The intensity of his green eyes made Hannibal's heart skip.

"It's him," Will stated, "he's our beast"

Hannibal nodded slowly, taking in the words as he turned on the car.

"Shall we call Jack then? Tell him we have our killer?" he asked.

"Not yet," Will said, after another short pause, "please, just… let me think"

"Take all the time you need, Will" Hannibal said gently, content to sit with Will for a moment. Their silence wasn't uncomfortable for either party, and Hannibal allowed himself time to process as well.

Take this chance I've given you, mein lieb. I know that you wish to kill him with your own hands, and I know that you're beginning to see yourself. Accept what you see, Will, love yourself. You are my reflection, and in loving yourself, you can love-

"I'll call Jack when I get home" Will suddenly said, pulling Hannibal back out of his thoughts.

Hannibal didn't audibly protest, though he did feel a twinge of disappointment at Will's choice. He started the car.

Will is bringing us down to the wire. I need him to be ready for me soon.

The road led slowly away from the museum, the frosty night air gathering around the Bentley in wisps, a gathering of trees to the right of them.

If Frederick is arrested before Will is ready, all I've worked for is lost.

There were no other cars, since the museum had closed almost an hour previous, so they were all alone.

I would be imprisoned, and he would say goodbye to me forever. I would lose Will forever .

Will started to say "Hannibal-", when a large object suddenly shot out from the trees in front of the car, merely a few meters away. It sprang off the road as quickly as it had landed, latching onto the hood of the Bentley and obscuring Hannibal's vision. He gasped just as the creature reached down and slashed at his front tire, tearing through the rubber. The car was

thrown to the right, running off the road, and if Hannibal hadn't hit his brakes when he did, they would have hit the trees just feet away.

Will had quickly raised his arms to shield his face, and when he finally looked up, he realized that Hannibal had been calling his name.

"Will, are you alright?" Hannibal said loudly, his anxiety clear through his strained tone.

"I'm okay," Will breathed, though he felt his breath beginning to quicken, "he's here. He followed us. He knows we know, and he's hunting us"

Hannibal didn't have time to respond before Will quickly got out of the car, gun drawn. Will aimed his weapon all around them, searching for the beast. He could feel eyes watching him and Hannibal both, tracking their movements, waiting to pounce. The feeling of being hunted mortified Will to his core, striking him in a place he hadn't been since he was young.

A jolt of fear ran through Hannibal, realizing the danger that the man was in, he quickly jumped out of the car, finding that Will had already ran around to his side of the car.

"Will-" he started, before Will cut him off, knowing what he was going to ask.

"I know he's there. He's going to try and kill us. Tear us apart. He'll kill us both, he's watching. He's waiting for us to let our guard down, he's-he's *playing* with us!"

Hannibal allowed instinct to take over and placed a hand to the back of Will's neck, bringing their foreheads together gently. Will gasped but didn't resist, staring up at Hannibal with confusion, eyes wild. Hannibal simply knew that the action was just as calming to Will as it was to him, and he was right. Will felt a few of his nerves loosening, his mind becoming a bit clearer by Hannibal's touch. They stayed there for a moment, both of them temporarily captivated by each other's presence, before they heard the snapping of twigs from nearby, and the sound of heavy footsteps.

Will turned to the mechanical beast that bolted at them from the darkness, the large jaws of an extinct predator gnashing the air. Will shot once at the creature, the bullet grazing its arm, but it only snarled and dove at Will before he could shoot again, knocking him from Hannibal's grasp.

Will felt the air knocked out of him as his back hit the hard ground beneath him, and he cried out as sharp claws dug into his arms, his gun falling from his hand. He could see its eyes -his *real* eyes- beneath the mask, the eyes of a caged animal with the illusion of freedom. The jaws snapped at him, only inches from his face and throat, threatening to tear him apart. Try as he might, Will couldn't force the giant off of him.

Hannibal didn't have to think to react, lunging for the animal and throwing it to the side, off of Will. He didn't even wait to watch it hit the ground a few feet away, instead struggling to see Will in the dark. Blood covered the man in thick, black pools, but Hannibal couldn't tell if any of the wounds were fatal.

No, they will not be. I refuse it.

"Will- Will, are you alright?" he asked, attempting to pull the man safely into his arms, but Tier's beast was up again.

Its jaws found Hannibal's forearm, ripping him away from Will, as if it knew what Will meant to him. Hannibal hissed at the pain, the jaws clamping down on his upper arm now, teeth digging into the flesh. Hannibal saw the wire sticking out from the jaw, and tore it out, the jaw losing some of its strength as one of the hydraulics stopped working.

The beast roared in anger at the damage to his creation, but it was unable to do anything before Will was suddenly on its back. His hands found one of the many teeth and he pulled, attempting to force it off of Hannibal. Instead, the large front tooth slipped from its socket, falling out of Will's hand to the ground. Will was met with a swipe across his chest for his actions, and he fell backwards, blood oozing from the large gashes. As soon as the beast turned to look at Will, Hannibal kicked its hind leg, effectively drawing its attention back to him. He was able to put his injured arm back up to block his face when he was attacked a second time, the jaw biting with less force, but still tearing at his skin through his suit jacket.

Will looked at the ground, finding his gun lying at his feet, and just a few feet away, the tooth he'd ripped from the beast's mouth. He heard a grunt from Hannibal and felt his blood run hot, knowing that the beast intended to kill him.

Hannibal’s knee found the underbelly, unable to reach the tender flesh of the man underneath, but making it's back paws slip. It gave Will the perfect amount of time to land a hard kick to the beast's ribcage, a crack sounding as it fell to Hannibal's side. It howled in pain, but Will was already rolling it onto its back and straddling it's middle. He didn't hesitate in seizing the damaged ribs and tearing them away exposing Randall Tier's chest inside.

You wanted to be an animal, so I'll treat you like one, you deserve that. Will thought, slamming the tooth in his hand down into Randall's chest with a loud cry, piercing flesh and cracking bone.

Randall cried as Will repeated the action again and again, his assault managing to get past the ribs and piercing his lungs. Randall's lungs filled with his own blood and he felt himself begin to cough and sputter, blood spurting out of the hydraulic jaws and head piece, the perfect depiction of a slain monster. Will took one last swift strike, leaving the tooth implanted in the beast's flesh. He turned quickly away from the animal, scrambling to Hannibal, who had fallen to the ground on his side.

Will shook the man by his good shoulder, though Hannibal could barely hear what he was saying. Never once had he ever felt such immense pride, swelling and fluttering his chest as he looked into the face of his beloved hunter. The scene was captivating, Will's swift, cruel justice was delivered upon Randall Tier, and the better of the two had come out of the fight alive.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Randall Tier breathe his last breath, but he didn't look away from Will for too long. The man was beautiful, bathed in blood, turning black in the moonlight. Hannibal knew that he wanted to look at him for eternity, spellbound by his eyes. He felt Will scoop him up into his lap, and he smiled softly as Will held him close, trying to wipe the blood from his face. Will's eyes bored into his, pleading for him to stay alive, with

him. Below Hannibal's foot rested Will's gun, long forgotten in the stead of a better weapon. Hannibal kicked it away.

"Hannibal, where are you hurt? Where did he hit you? Hannibal *please* , say something!"

Of course he heard Will calling him, but his urges took over. If he was to die (which he doubted he would, but he couldn't see the future), he was to die knowing Will's lips. He leaned up and closed their gap swiftly, one arm around Will's shoulders. It was as if every injury he'd sustained was instantly healed, the pain long gone, and in its place was a bliss that Hannibal had never known before. Will’s lips were rough, chapped, and he tasted faintly of iron. It was the perfect taste for him, it was how Hannibal had pictured it. With this flavor, Hannibal found the idea of eating his love so much more enticing, but he would never in a million years sacrifice Will to his hunger.

Will kissed back on instinct, thoughts racing too fast for him to register, and he could only focus on moving the other man's plush lips against his.

"You are so beautiful," Hannibal murmured against his lips, not daring to pull away, "so beautiful, my Will. Thank you, thank you. It was so *beautiful* "

The loss of blood made Hannibal's head swim, and merciless gravity pulled him from Will's kiss, though Will made sure he didn't hit the ground. Will held his head to his chest, rocking him and whispering something he couldn't quite hear.

"Don't go," he heard, "hold on, just a little bit longer, please, we can get you to a hospital, *please* "

Hannibal saw headlights of a car approaching ahead, lights flashing red and blue. His mind was brought back to that cold December night behind Will's house, frantically scribbling his formula into his journal, before the police showed up to separate him from Will forever. He'd come so far from that moment, and he refused to let go now. Especially when his darling begged him so sweetly to stay.

Chapter 11

Hannibal awoke in a place he didn't recognize, but he knew it was a hospital room almost instantly. His arm ached beneath the bandages that covered it, but it barely concerned him. The wounds weren't debilitating, so they weren't worth worrying too much over, though, the scars would develop quite nicely. They'd prove to be a long lasting reminder of the night of Will's first kill. Not that he'd ever forget it.

A desire had been itching the back of his mind ever since he woke up; he wanted to draw it. The image of Will tearing, and beating, and destroying. Not because he'd had to, but because he so desperately craved the satisfaction of dealing out justice.

Even in such a situation, such pain and fear, he chose the tooth and his own hands over a gun.

Hannibal wanted to draw it, paint it, sculpt it, compose it. He wanted that moment to exist in every medium, so that he might surround himself with it.

While he was exceedingly proud of Will's performance, he was also terribly worried about him. Where was he? How much did he remember? Or regret? Hannibal had full faith in the doctors at the hospital, but he could trust no one with his most prized possession.

Despite the nurses' protests, Hannibal all but demanded Will's room number, and he was instantly relieved to hear that the man wasn't in intensive care. The moment he was allowed out of bed, he made his way to Will's room.

The man was awake. Drowsy, yes, but still awake and alright. Hannibal smiled at him, feeling all of his tension melt away as he drank in the sight. Will had been bathed in blood the last time that he'd seen him. Now, after being washed and cared for, he looked like a completely different person. It was hard to picture the man in the bed as the man who'd killed Randall Tier and his monster.

Hannibal pulled up a chair to Will's bedside and sat, allowing Will the opportunity to speak first. Will's eyes fluttered open, sensing his partner, and the green was barely visible from underneath his eyelids. Despite how weary he must be, he looked almost invigorated, more alive than he had been. The change had occurred, and Hannibal couldn't wait to see Will in full health again.

"How's your arm?" Will croaked.

Hannibal looked down at the sling. "It will heal, I'm alright. And you, Will?"

"Hurts, got stitches. But aside from that, I'm fine"

Will sat up with some difficulty, looking at Hannibal with lidded eyes.

"How are you feeling internally, now that you have killed Randall Tier?" Hannibal asked.

Will swallowed.

"Did you satisfy yourself?" Hannibal continued, "Did you give him the punishment you thought he deserved?"

"He was a, uh… an animal, caged inside of a man, and when he wore his suit, he could pretend that the animal was free, but he wasn't. He was out of the cage, but he always had to go back in at the end of the day, he was lying to himself. He wasn't letting himself fully transform. I let him die as an animal, at least"

Hannibal nodded slowly, before asking again, "Are you satisfied?"

A moment swam by, Will almost looked like he was going to nod off again. But instead, he breathed a quiet, "Yes"

Hannibal allowed himself a smile, but it quickly faded as Will looked up at him, into his eyes.

"I think I'm more satisfied here, now, than I've ever been. Thank you, doctor"

Hannibal's smile returned tenfold, and Will wore one to match. The scales of their understanding balanced out the smallest bit more.

Equality is quite euphoric, isn't it?

Hannibal didn't have to stay another night, his injuries primarily on his arms, so he was allowed to leave later that afternoon. He was extremely grateful, he wanted to make Will an actual lunch. However, as he was leaving he was stopped by Alana in the hall, who was extremely worried for Hannibal and Will both. After assuring her that he was alright, Alana added through clenched teeth, "I just wanted to make sure Jack wasn't harping on *you* too"

Hannibal quickly abandoned the idea of leaving that hospital. Alana had known what she was doing, knew that Hannibal was just as protective of Will as she was, perhaps more. If Jack wouldn't listen to her, maybe he'd listen to both of them.

Upon arriving at Will's hospital room, Hannibal caught the last few sentences from each of them.

"Where was your gun?"

"I don't know, it-it disarmed me, I couldn't find it, and it wasn't stopping him"

"So you chose to stab him in the chest *eight times* ?"

Jack stopped talking when he noticed Hannibal entering, and gave Alana a look of disapproval. She responded with a similar glare.

"It's a bit early in the day to begin with interrogations, Jack" Hannibal said, walking to Will's beside, opposite of Jack.

"Randall Tier's corpse was found practically mutilated, I want to know why"

"Will acted in self defense"

"He was acting in defense with Garret Jacob Hobbs and shot him ten times. He acts in self defense against Randall Tier and he stabs him eight times. I'm just wondering if this is going to be a pattern that I should look out for"

"Whatever Will is doing to defend himself doesn't matter," Alana argued, "he isn't running around finding excuses to maim people!"

"I didn't want to believe that either but that's what I'm afraid of"

"He and Hannibal would have died if Will didn't do what he did!"

"Will had no way of knowing that Randall Tier would attack us, he couldn't have planned this" Hannibal said.

"I'm not saying it was premeditated," Jack stated simply, "but could it have been a happy accident?"

" *No* ," Will hissed, "you weren't there Jack. It slashed through tires like they were *nothing* , Hannibal broke its jaw and his arm is still torn up-"

"Lucky coincidence for you-"

"I shot him and he didn't even flinch!"

"Then why the tooth?!" Jack yelled, "How is it that the tooth could do what your gun couldn't?"

"If he had taken the time to find the gun, Hannibal would be dead, Jack!" Alana shouted back.

Jack finally went quiet, turning to Will after a moment. The man looked shaken, but looked back at him.

"Do I have to worry about you, Will?" Jack asked, quietly now.

"No Jack," Will said, "no you don't"

"Good" Jack said, though, he didn't look entirely convinced.

"Just wait for the crime scene to be analyzed," Hannibal chimed in, "this will reveal more about the crime itself, and we can see for ourselves just how much you must worry about Will"

Chapter 12

Hannibal had just left Will that afternoon. They'd spent nearly two hours together, Hannibal having brought Will a nice lunch, and never before had they talked for so long without the guise of therapy, and Hannibal was thrilled. Will even smiled for him, *laughed* for him. And yet, he left the hospital with a pit of unease that lasted the rest of the afternoon, and into his dinner preparations.

He was alone, so it would be a simple escargot and roasted broccoli with a brazil nut pesto.

Not once, not even once, had Will mentioned their kiss. That single, perfect moment of true intimacy.

His lips gave me love. I believed I loved him before, but my feelings were a cinder compared to the fire that is burning me now. I cannot imagine a better world having felt his lips. It's strange how even still I can change from his influence.

Hannibal would think about the kiss for weeks to come, years likely.

He slid the baking sheet of his snails into the oven.

He'd already begun a sketch of what he could only imagine the scene had looked like.

The snails were roasting alive, luckily for them, they couldn't feel a thing.

It was heaven, a true picture of happiness for them. That was what he'd bent time for, Will's happiness.

He watched the snails sizzle, the timer startling him slightly.

Had Will been happy?

He set the finished snails aside.

It was the question that had been causing Hannibal his anxiety since he got home from the hospital.

He said nothing to me. Knowing him, surely he would have said something. Perhaps he doesn't remember it? He gave Jack Crawford plenty of detail about Tier, so wouldn't he remember that as well?

He processed the garlic and parsley with butter, losing himself in thought more than once.

Perhaps he wasn't happy with it, and he's trying to ignore it. I wouldn't put it past him to do something like that.

The thought that Will would avoid talking to him about it made Hannibal's stomach lurch. All that trust they had worked so hard to build together, down the drain.

Occasionally he tasted the green paste before he added more of which ingredient he felt was best. It took him more than a few tries to get it where he wanted it.

Nothing in this world could break my heart more .

Hannibal suddenly walked back to the pantry, realizing that he'd grabbed the wrong spice by accident.

What does Will think of me?

What if the kiss was what ended this all? Not Tobias Budge, not Jack Crawford, or Randall Tier, but Hannibal's own recklessness.

What a fool I was. Our first kiss may have been our last, because Will is not ready.

Hannibal processed his ingredients to make his pesto. They churned in endless circles.

Will *had* seemed off when Hannibal visited him, as if something was on his mind.

Hannibal cut the broccoli into bite-sized florets, noting how much he had to concentrate on not cutting himself.

The way Will had stared up at Hannibal for too long before looking back down at his lunch. He fidgeted, even flinched when Hannibal so much as raised his fork.

Fork, yes, silverware, I must remember to set out the silverware.

Of *course* Will would be upset about it. It had been sudden, and they'd both nearly died that night, and Will was also coming to terms with his first kill, and *he wasn't ready* .

The broccoli went into the oven.

But even still, Hannibal could not bring himself to entirely regret it. The kiss was wonderful, he'd felt as if he and Will had finally, truly connected.

Did I set the timer? Ah yes, I did, of course I did, why wouldn't I?

Two burdened minds were one for a fleeting, blissful moment. It was a feeling unique to those few whose souls were made of the same thing, and had finally united. Whatever was missing inside of Hannibal had been replaced with everything Will.

How cruel of God to give me a chance of having Will's heart only to rip it away as soon as I get close. I shouldn't be surprised.

There was a knock at the front door, and Hannibal looked up. He took his broccoli florets out of the oven to cool, then walked briskly to his entryway.

Yet another of his unjust games.

Hannibal opened the door and stopped. There was Will, the man who had the most wonderful habit of showing up right when he was needed. His damp hair was flattened across his forehead. He was pale, panting as if he'd ran all the way to Hannibal's front door, his eyes craving answers.

"You… you *kissed* me" he breathed.

"I did" Hannibal said after a beat, his heart thrumming in his chest.

He felt a tight knot in his throat, and he'd have preferred if Will just choked him with his bare hands instead of making his body *betray* him like this.

"You didn't talk about it at the hospital, at all. I thought you would, but then you left and- and I needed to know"

Hannibal didn't tear his eyes away, he couldn't, though he knew they were giving all of him away.

"Forgive me, Will," he whispered, "I indulged in you"

And you aren't ready.

Will stood frozen, and Hannibal's heart did the same.

Will suddenly closed in on him, hands finding either side of Hannibal's face and crashing their lips together. Hannibal's eyes closed with a whimper of surprise as Will held him there, pulling back for only a second to adjust his angle, then closing in again, his lips moving with more fervor. Hannibal's hands found Will's arms, caressing them gently, it was the only thing he could do to ground them both.

Will, oh, Will. Once again you prove me wrong. Oh, how deeply I care for you, how I need *you. I want to put the world in your hands, give you the very throne God sits upon.*

Will panted against Hannibal's lips, then leaned in once more. Each kiss seemed to send Hannibal spinning even further, destroying him. Hannibal pulled away, his body unable to take any more loss of control, he was surprised he had enough left to hold himself back. He shuddered as Will slowly released his head, hands choosing the back of his neck instead.

The anxiety that had plagued Hannibal all evening had disappeared just like that, and it was replaced with the strongest sensation of satisfaction he'd ever felt. Will kissed him, *chose* him, showed him the ultimate symbol of his trust. Will had placed his beating heart in Hannibal's care in that split second.

And it shall forever be my most prized possession. I will care for it everyday that it beats for me, and I will keep it in the innermost rooms of my memory palace, next to my own heart. It will be kept warm by the hottest fire I can create in myself. I will place it in my deepest affections for you, safe from everything. You're safe.

"Hannibal," Will called softly, and Hannibal's eyes suddenly opened to see him, "why are you doing this with me?"

"Oh Will," Hannibal smiled, gently stroking the back of Will's head with his hand, "because I care about you, truly I do, more than I've cared for most"

Will shuddered, briefly leaning into Hannibal's lips once again, love radiating from him.

"I don't think this is… a conventional form of therapy" he said with a breathy laugh.

Hannibal chuckled. "Would you like to stop?"

"No, no I didn't say that…"

"Then would you like to continue?"

"Over dinner?"

"Of course, I'd be delighted. Please, come inside Will"

It was Thursday when Frederick Chilton found a dismembered, mutilated Abel Gideon in his spare room, and the FBI found several agents brutally murdered in his home. He was caught trying to flee the state and was apprehended.

"They have the wrong man," Will told Hannibal, "Frederick Chilton is not the Chesapeake Ripper"

"What makes you say so?" Hannibal asked.

"Chilton doesn't see beauty like the Chesapeake Ripper does, he sees it as an unmoving thing, death is not beautiful to him. He can't be faking his kind of pride either"

Hannibal smiled lightly. Since their infatuation, Will and Hannibal had discontinued their therapy. But if Hannibal kept one hour of his schedule open and Will happened to show up, well, he couldn't really turn away a guest, could he?

Hannibal stood with Will at the window.

"Tell me, please, how closely do your views on beauty relate to the Ripper's?"

Will paused. "A bit too close for comfort, I prefer not to think about it too much"

"Why not? Is it not a blessing to find more beauty than less?"

"But beauty in death? In- in taking life? Is something really beautiful if it's hideous to all the world except for one person?"

Hannibal went quiet for a short moment, his heart clenching at Will's words.

How can he not accept it yet?

"In 1499, Sandro Botticelli painted and displayed 'La Primavera'," Hannibal began, "several scenes, all happening at once, within one painting. It captured my attention for years when I was a young man, I always found a new meaning within it. I have never found anything similar since, and I do not believe I would be the same man if I had never known La Primavera"

Hannibal hadn't initially noticed Will had turned to look at him, but once he did, he allowed their eyes to lock.

"Suppose if Botticelli had chosen to conceal this work from the world, hide it away, alter it. I would not know the peace I do now, nor would I have ever experienced what may have well been empathy. If a beauty is left unseen, it never has the chance to be beautiful to someone"

Will felt a slight heat in his cheeks at Hannibal's words. Hannibal's blood colored eyes caught him in chains, holding him in their spell.

"If I didn't know any better," Will said slowly, quietly, "I would think you were saying my fascination with death is beautiful"

Hannibal had a small smile on his face, his breath long taken from him.

"My views are quite similar to yours, as I told you" he whispered.

Will broke first, finally leaning in to give Hannibal the tender kiss he'd been thinking about since he'd walked in the door. He gently gripped the back of Hannibal's head, though he certainly didn't need to force the man to kiss him back.

Hannibal hummed quietly in the back of his throat, leaning into Will's wonderful lips. They were chapped, slightly rough, but they kissed with insistence. They didn't pull away from each other, they couldn't if they tried, but neither wanted to anyway.

Chapter 13

The Ripper's last victim was practically a confession, found only a day after the supposed Ripper's arrest. It was in Frederick's basement, in the back of the room, slain the day that Frederick was arrested. Jack had one last crime scene, one last work of the Ripper before he was locked away for good. What Will saw broke his heart for Jack, and for himself.

The corpse's own heart was in his hand, filled with hard whiskey and lit aflame. He held it out, a gift, a miracle. His brown curls were adorned with small roses and forget-me-nots, he looked truly beautiful. Will couldn't hear Jack over his own anger boiling in his ears, simmering at his fingertips. His fingers dug into his palms, scalding hot, and though Jack pressed him for what he was thinking, Will blew him off.

"It's a mockery" he spat as he stomped to his car.

"What do you mean by that?" Jack asked, close behind as Will fished his keys out of his pocket.

"This man gave the Ripper his heart, and he-" Will restrained the emotion in his voice, "he ripped it out. He used it, cooked it, *ate it* "

"This man loves the Ripper?" Jack asked.

"Yeah," Will said, "and it was the biggest mistake he's ever made"

Will shut his car door, gripping the steering wheel tightly. That was his favorite brand of whiskey in that heart.

Hannibal waited calmly in his kitchen, dinner almost ready. Lamb, that night. The meat was so tender when he'd butchered it, it would be truly delicious. He distantly heard his front door open and shut, though he didn't flinch. He'd left it unlocked for a reason, after all.

He heard slow, deliberate footsteps coming down the hallway and took the meat off the burner. He looked up just as Will entered his kitchen, hand on the gun at his hip. Hannibal looked at it with curiosity, but as his eyes flicked up to Will's, he nearly shrank back.

Will was angry with him, Hannibal expected it, but he'd forgotten the hurt and betrayal that had been in Will's eyes. It struck Hannibal into silence as his heart ached for his beloved's pain.

"Will-"

"Stop talking" Will spat. Hannibal obeyed, waiting anxiously for Will to speak. His stomach was in knots, and his fear stuck in his throat, choking him.

"Why?" Will asked, "Why me? Why did you choose *me* to toy with?"

"Will, I have not been toying with you" Hannibal said, ashamed at the nervousness in his own voice, "but you know I couldn't have told you the truth before now"

Will paced in front of Hannibal like a predator, and the prey stood frozen.

"You work towards beauty"

"I do not tolerate ugliness" Hannibal admitted.

"You humiliated every single one of those people in their deaths because they were ugly, why?"

Hannibal smiled slightly. "They were rude. Discourtesy is the ugliest thing in this world to me"

Will nodded, but he didn't relax.

"And me. This- this thing that we've become. You kissed me that night, you told me you cared about me"

"I do care about you"

"You were using me, so I wouldn't see who you were"

"I've been showing you who I am," Hannibal objected, "every little piece, I have shown you who I am. You know me best, Will. You've seen my last work, haven't you? How do you interpret it?"

"You mocked me" Will hissed.

"No, no, dear Will. I meant it as a 'thank you'. It's only polite, after all"

"Thank you for *what*?"

"Your trust," Hannibal said softly, "I'm more than aware of how hard earned your trust is, Will, and I wanted to thank you for it"

"Obviously it was misplaced. I should have known that night, when you-" Will didn't finish.

Hannibal sighed. "What you showed me that night was… beautiful. You, using your own two hands to administer justice that was well deserved in your eyes. I have felt this way for you for longer than you think, but seeing that performance I couldn't contain myself anymore"

Will stared at Hannibal, trying to search for the lie in his face, in his body language, in *anything* . He couldn't find it, and it terrified and angered him to his core. He quickly raised his gun from his belt, pointing it between Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal gasped quietly, a jolt of hurt and fear surging through him. This was *not* Will's justice, this was him lashing out in pain and betrayal. This was *not* his design. He didn't want to die for Will like this, Will could never be satisfied with killing him so plainly.

"Tell me, Will," he said, "does the Chesapeake Ripper deserve a bullet for what he's done?"

Will's lip twitched into a snarl, and he placed his finger on the trigger. Hannibal closed his eyes in defeat, waiting for that quiet shroud of death to finally take him away from his beloved- "*Will no!*" A gunshot.

Hannibal's eyes flung open. In front of him, Will stood frozen in shock, the gun no longer in his hands, and next to him was little Abigail. The girl had taken the gun away from Will, a rogue shot having gone through the floor when she'd done so. She and Will stared at each other, both in shock of having not seen each other for so long.

"Abigail?" Will said, disbelieving.

Her name snapped her out of her fright, and she quickly unloaded the weapon in her hands, tossing the magazine in one direction, and the gun in the other.

The two were silent, and Hannibal watched them closely. He knew Abigail by now, as well as what he'd taught her.

"Will misses you terribly"

"He does?"

"Yes. He has taken your death terribly personally, he feels responsible"

"What are you gonna do?"

"I am going to help him come to terms with his own nature, the same as I have done to you"

"And what is my nature?"

"A hunter, a survivor. Your father forced you to kill those that you didn't want to. Tell me, why do you want to hunt?"

"Fur, bone, meat"

"Then that is why you will hunt. You will never have to kill for your safety ever again"

"How can you be so sure?"

"I told you before, Will and I are going to protect you. He cares about you far more than you know"

"He thinks he's my dad"

"He may well be, Abigail. He intends to treat you far better than your father did. Where your father used you to control his obsession with you, Will wants nothing more than to see you for what you are"

Abigail stared, seeing Will and remembering Hannibal's words. She watched as tears began to well in Will's eyes, and felt her own eyes becoming misty.

He's happy to see me, she thought.

She went to him, wrapping her arms around his neck and holding him tightly. Will was stunned, but held her back. She felt like she did before, she felt *real*, but he could scarcely believe it.

"You're alive?" he asked with a shudder.

Abigail nodded with a laugh, "Hannibal saved me"

Will looked at Hannibal over Abigail's shoulder, who stared back. When Abigail pulled away from Will, she too looked to Hannibal

Taking his chance, Hannibal slowly walked around his kitchen island and toward Will. Will tensed as he drew closer, but Hannibal gently wrapped his arm around Will's waist, his opposite hand going to Abigail's shoulder.

He could remember a moment similar to this that they shared in his kitchen, and he'd had a knife hidden in his hand. He'd gored his treasure, his joy, and abandoned him on the floor, hurt, alone. It had been the last time he'd ever seen his darling Abigail. He'd gotten to see Will's pain in person, when he'd brought Will home that cold, winter's night. The scar on his stomach and the one on his forehead were both horrible reminders of all the reasons that Will had to say 'Goodbye Hannibal'.

Never again. Will is not marred by these scars now, and he never will be. I will not mark his skin like this ever again, I promise myself that.

"You showed me everything in your scenes," Will whispered, "you practically told me who you are, what you are. Why? Why show me that, when you knew it would get you caught?"

"Will, forgive me," Hannibal whispered back, "I fell in love with you"

Will gasped quietly, hands finding Hannibal's forearm and squeezing tightly. He leaned his forehead against Hannibal's, who reciprocated almost immediately.

"Please Will," he said softly, "you have such beauty. I know you can see it, I know you can, do not deny it to yourself"

After a painfully long moment of silence, Will sighed and closed his eyes. Hannibal ached to know what he was thinking. Would he take his hand, leave this world with him and Abigail and find his true beauty? Would he take Abigail and hand Hannibal over to the FBI? Hannibal had willingly allowed Will to corner him, and now he was suffering the consequences.

"Hannibal," Will said, voice sharp, a command coming quickly, "what do we do?"

Hannibal felt his heart skip and his blood stir in his veins. He quickly pulled away from Will and Abigail, shaking the smallest amount. Will's touch was an electric current, it stimulated every nerve, every muscle, and he couldn't take it. Will was having him, *Will was having him* , the sentence was surreal. After so long spent planning, aching for Will's very touch, reordering the very fabric of time, Hannibal finally had what he wanted.

What a lovesick fool you've made me, Will. Here I am, the killer that so troubled you, that you've lusted for, that you've seen in your least favorite dreams, and with five words you've brought me to nothing more than a desperate man on his knees. The most disturbing thing about everything I've gone through at your hands is that you've utterly shattered my self that I worked so terribly hard to build, and I can't find an ounce of me that cares.

Hannibal smiled at Abigail and Will fondly, Abigail returning the smile, Will's gaze holding steady. Hannibal knew exactly what they were going to do, of course, he always did, but he was just so excited to get started.

Chapter 14

Hannibal's eyes fluttered open, his mind coming back to him slowly. The first thing he saw was the window across the room from him. The sky was a brilliant blue, speckled with clouds. The warmth of the last days of summer could be seen with your own eyes, just from the way the Italian air seemed to shine.

It didn't take long for Hannibal to notice Will's arm wrapped around his waist from behind, hand resting on his chest. Will was pleasantly warm, pressed against his back, but there were things to be done, and they couldn't stay in bed all day, this time.

Hannibal slowly began to pull away, but the arm tightened around him, and Will groaned in displeasure. It was their daily morning game, of who could break the will of the other.

"Buongiorno, dolcezza," Hannibal said quietly, rolling over to face his opponent, "it's nearly seven o'clock"

"Okay" Will murmured, his eyes remaining closed.

"We have to make breakfast"

"I'm not hungry"

"And if Abigail is?"

"She's a big girl, she can make breakfast for herself if she needs to"

Hannibal chuckled, brushing a misbehaving lock of hair away from Will's face. Will wrinkled his nose sleepily, simply burrowing his face into Hannibal's neck in defiance. Hannibal sighed, finding Will fitting so perfectly perfectly against him that he sighed in defeat, pulling the blankets up over them again.

Will smirked, pressing a sleepy kiss to Hannibal's neck, delighted by the deep hum that came from his chest. He won their battle, just as he had the previous morning, and he took his victory with a fiendish pride. Hannibal allowed Will to drag him back into slumber, and awoke again when the sun was substantially higher in the sky.

This time, he pulled himself from the bed before Will could catch him, and began to dress himself. He sensed Will becoming aware of his surroundings behind him, and smirked at the groan that meant Will knew he'd escaped.

"We do have to get out of bed sometime, dearest" Hannibal said, choosing a simple dress shirt for that day. It was hard enough just getting out of bed with Will practically begging him to stay, let alone getting completely dressed.

Will sighed, and Hannibal heard the sheets rustling before Will pressed against his back, a last resort to get him back into bed. A hand slid underneath Hannibal's shirt as he fastened the

last button at the top. Will's fingers found Hannibal's chest hair and lingered there. The shirt was tight against his hand, confining.

"You wore this one the other day" Will thought aloud.

"It's washed, if that's what you're getting at" Hannibal chuckled.

"No, no that's not it"

"I am also aware that you like how it looks on me" Hannibal said plainly, not hesitating to push himself back against Will's groin as he put on slacks. Will made a small gasping noise, and as Hannibal stood, he felt a hand on his shoulder, spinning him around.

Will took a moment, studying him, his eyes, his hair, and the smile on his lips. Will's eyes traveled just a bit further and found the buttoned shirt collar around Hannibal's neck. In an instant, he undid the pesky thing, and then the one just below it for good measure. And Hannibal allowed it contentedly. Will leaned in for a kiss, and Hannibal obeyed, kissing him long and gentle. It was only a good morning, afterall.

"Get dressed, sweeting," Hannibal whispered against his lips, "I'll cook for us"

Will smirked, pressing one final kiss to Hannibal's mouth, then pulling away to find a different shirt for the day. Hannibal sighed, before turning to exit their shared bedroom.

He made his way quietly down the stairs, finding Abigail already sitting in her favorite chair. She'd claimed it the day they'd first entered their new home, and neither Hannibal nor Will fought her for it.

"Hey" she smiled, looking up from her book. Hannibal had recommended her *Pride and Prejudice* .

"Good morning Abigail," he greeted, "how did you sleep?"

"Fine," Abigail replied, "still having dreams about my father"

"They will pass, my dear. You're far stronger than your father himself, let alone a distant memory of him. They will go away"

"That's the dream" Abigail sighed, returning to her reading.

The girl really was in her element here, he knew she would be, but it was odd to see her so relaxed. Not that he was complaining, of course.

He made his way into the kitchen (he'd just finished reorganizing it), and first went to the pantry, grabbing a few tomatoes, scallions, and some parsley.

Abigail entered the kitchen, sitting on the stool at the island, book still in front of her. Hannibal briefly placed a gentle hand on her back, and she smiled softly. Setting out his ingredients, he then took a knife from the knife block and his cutting board.

Will then entered, his hair combed, and looking significantly more awake than he had earlier. He and Abigail greeted each other as Hannibal next went to the freezer, opening it and pulling out a package of sausages.

The family went quiet, the silence spreading through all of them at the same time. Their eyes were fixed on the same spot, but none of them spoke. The silence said it all. Abigail was the first to look away, opting to continue reading instead.

"We're almost out of meat" she remarked, turning the page.

Abigail was an expert hunter at this point. Her expertise was with firearms, true, but Hannibal was slowly and surely training that out of her. She did such a better job with her hands and a knife, she could take down men and women so much bigger than her and do it beautifully. Of course, he had to give a little credit to her birth father for her knowledge of anatomy, but her appetite was all her own, and not even the abuse from Garrett Jacob Hobbs could stomp out that burning flame. However, Abigail wouldn't be going after their prey this time.

Will often took more of a backseat when the family hunted, choosing to follow Hannibal's lead instead. It wasn't like he didn't enjoy it, no no, the look he had in his eye as he watched Hannibal's slow, expert hands strip the meat from bone was nothing short of enraptured. He simply didn't have a clue of what he would do with these people. Hannibal's regular gutting and harvesting would pay their debts well enough. But today, he'd expressed a desire to take charge, to pick the victim, and who was Hannibal to deny him that?

Will had been hunting this boar for some time now, Hannibal discovered to his own delight. He'd seen him twice in the market, the first time he was quite inconsiderate towards someone he'd bumped into. The second time, a wife and a bruised, terrified child trailed behind him. After further talking to the swine, getting to know him, Will's suspicions were confirmed. He was an abusive, cowardly *pig* .

Hannibal and Abigail stood outside a small bar, waiting patiently. The night was chilly, but not so unbearable that they'd sit in the car, Abigail only hugged her jacket closer to her body. Will had gone inside after calling the pig, asking him to meet for drinks, and he'd agreed.

Now Hannibal and Abigail waited their turns. It had only been an hour, and Will was already exiting the bar, the pig's arm around his shoulders as he stumbled, intoxicated. He was barely conscious.

"Drugged him, did you?" Hannibal asked in amusement.

"Didn't want you both to wait too long" Will responded, not too careful with the man's head.

Hannibal knew they'd have to wait some time before taking meat to let the drug pass through him, but that was no matter.

Abigail walked to the car, parked only a few feet away, and opened the door for Will. Will put the man in the backseat and buckled him in, Hannibal requesting gently that Abigail sit in the front with him and Will.

"The worst he can do is drool on me" Abigail had said, but complied at the sight of Hannibal's look.

Will drove, but right as they arrived at their desired location (an empty building, where they would leave their display), he took a sharp left turn.

"Will?" Hannibal asked.

"Just trust me" Will said.

After a few minutes or so, they arrived at the house of the swine, Will turning the headlights off and parking the car in the driveway.

"Wait here" he said, not waiting for their response before getting out and approaching the house, the man's keys in hand.

Hannibal had to admit it to himself, it was quite exciting to see Will behaving like this. All of his actions now were his own. He would have to see how *else* Will wanted to take control once their job was finished (Will often got so riled up by a good hunt, Hannibal couldn't resist taking advantage of that stamina). Hannibal closed his eyes in the darkness, listening to his thoughts for a few moments.

"You delight, I tolerate. I don't have your appetite. Goodbye Hannibal"

Hannibal opened his eyes just in time to see Will exiting the house with a woman slung over his shoulder.

Oh how I adore you, you perfect man .

Will placed the woman next to her husband, both unconscious, though she was the only one sporting a large bruise on her forehead. She'd let her husband do this to her child, she was just as guilty as he was, and Will wanted her to know it. Well, if she couldn't take care of her own family, she could at least take care of his.

When Will got back in the driver seat, he looked over at Hannibal, a soft but cold look in his eyes, piercing Hannibal's core.

"Hello, Hannibal"

"Hello Will"

Hannibal smiled from afar as he watched Abigail pulling out her tools, laying them out on the table top. The man lying just feet away watched in horror, struggling against his bindings. Abigail tied her hair up, a sigh coming from her chest.

"You don't have to watch me, you know" she said, not looking back at Hannibal.

"I'm here for your protection, should he break free"

"He won't, you know he won't"

"What if I were to say I truly love seeing your work?"

Abigail smiled fondly, taking her gutting knife in her hand.

"Then I guess you can stay"

"Fottuta puttana!" the man yelled as he tried in vain to twist away from the girl, "Vai a ucciderti, puttana!"

"What's he saying?" Abigail asked curiously.

Hannibal didn't answer her, but spoke to the pig, "Se non smetti di imprecare davanti a mia figlia, perderai la lingua, signore Bonnadello"

The pig quieted, and Abigail quickly stabbed into his gut, dragging her blade upward with such beautiful skill. Signore Bonnadello yelled in pain as the girl dug into his open chest cavity, trying to fight against the binds on his hands, holding him nice and still.

Suddenly, the door to the basement opened, and Will came carefully down the stairs, dragging Signora Bonnadello behind him. The woman was gagged with tape and a cloth shoved crudely into her mouth, but she shrieked when she saw the state of her husband.

"Will," Hannibal started, looking at the woman with sympathy, "that is quite ill mannered"

"Her screaming hurt my ears, and she was gonna wake the neighbors" Will said coldly, allowing the tied woman to fall harshly to the floor.

"I was about to do that to this one, but Hannibal said the magic words that made him shut up apparently," Abigail remarked as she sliced along the lungs, taking a peek, "you smoke?"

The man gave her a strange look, but quickly nodded his head.

"Oh, damn-"

"Language, Abigail" Hannibal warned. It was the pig's fault, he was sure. Horrible influence on his child.

"Sorry. Your wife smoke?"

The man's eyes were rolling back into his head, lungs filling with his own blood. Abigail sighed and looked back at the woman on the floor.

"Do you smoke?"

The woman didn't respond, she only gave a muffled sob at the sight of her dying husband. Will bent down to her, rolling her onto her back.

"She asked you something, what is your answer?" he asked softly, but his tone didn't disguise the malice of it. The woman shook her head quickly, and Abigail nodded, turning back to continue her harvest.

"You're next, you know," Will told the woman quietly, brushing the hair from her eyes so he could look at her, "but I think you already knew that. You always thought you'd burn in Hell right behind your husband, didn't you? You let him hurt your child, you chose him over your own son"

The woman sobbed loudly, trying desperately to scream out her protests, but she could not.

"Watch Abigail, then. If you watched your son be tortured, then you can certainly watch your husband too. It's only fair"

Will roughly gripped the woman's hair, dragging her back to her feet and holding her head just so that her husband's open chest cavity was in view. Hannibal felt a warm, blissful smile cross his face at the sight.

You have truly allowed yourself to become what you always were. My life, my love, my heart, your beauty lies in your morality, and how it's shifted. You no longer lie awake, longing for the ever so distant satisfaction of deciding what is just, do you? You've always known that you held that power, you were simply too frightened to use it, too hurt. So many things tried desperately to stifle your beauty, but even that couldn't destroy you.

Hannibal looked down at the golden band on his fourth finger. Will had taken his off, far too afraid of getting it dirty, tainting it, but Hannibal knew that their love had been bathed in the blood of those below them since the beginning. The gold glistened in the lighting, if Hannibal didn't know any better, he would be convinced it was glowing.

My sweet darling, my treasure, I keep my promise to you with ease. Cherishing you is all I've ever wanted to do. I cannot stand behind my decision to take Bedelia to this place. Passion, I suppose, is something I can no longer have without you.

Hannibal came back into reality as Will suddenly snapped the woman's neck, dropping her to the floor next to him. Abigail had already begun to clean off her tools in the sink, her catch already long dead. She turned with surprise at Will's action.

"What was that for?"

"She didn't deserve to accept her death, she needed to go quick," Will spat, "you don't want this one, she's bitter"

"Well Hannibal wanted lungs"

"Bitter can be corrected, colomba," Hannibal whispered, leaving a gentle kiss on Will's cheek, "it will be alright"

"If anyone can fix someone like her, it's you" Will responded with a sigh.

Hannibal smiled with delight, catching Abigail's grin as Will scooped up the woman and placed her on the table next to her husband, none too gentle with her limp neck.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

17+ Chapter (moderately explicit)

Hannibal took a sip, blood red wine slipping down his throat, though it did little to quench his thirst. Will did this often, especially when Abigail went out, which she had. Will had settled himself into Hannibal's lap, back pressed against his chest, and his eyes were closed peacefully. However, he did innocently shift his hips ever so slightly, and if he happened to grind on Hannibal's groin, he could hardly be blamed for doing something in his sleep.

Oh, but Hannibal *did* blame him.

Will was devilish at the best of times, and he could be a downright brat if he wanted. Teasing Hannibal was his favorite pastime, and it seemed that he had been looking for an excuse to do it for a while.

Hannibal suppressed a groan as Will's ass pressed against him just so, his arousal growing harder to ignore.

"What are you doing, you terrible thing?" he asked, gently, his breath not returning to him.

A small grin spread on Will's face, he knew he'd been caught.

"What do you mean?"

"You know, if you want something, traditionally, you use your words to ask for it"

Will shifted, turning himself so that he faced Hannibal, still sitting comfortably in his lap. Hannibal's erection was very distracting at this point, and it would have been a crime not to press him further.

"But you already understand me so well," he said softly, "and if you know what I want, what's the use of words when I can just as easily communicate with action?"

"Trust me, my Will, there have been times where I was quite unsure what you wanted"

"What are you talking about?" Will chuckled, his lips finding Hannibal's, claiming them for a while before continuing, "You knew I wanted you, you always knew that, even before I did"

"There were times when I had my… doubts"

"Forgive me if I ever gave that impression-"

"Goodbye, Hannibal"

"-but you knew that I needed your love. You gave it to me, just- just like that"

"Love sought is good, but given unsought is better" Hannibal said quietly.

"Shakespeare, really?"

"His words are true, aren't they? Was it comforting, being wanted first? Being wanted for your whole being?"

Will smiled distantly, giving Hannibal's neck a kiss, "It was less a comfort and more of a… relief. Like I never knew how easy it could be"

"To be loved?"

"And to love"

"Loving you," Hannibal sighed, "has been the easiest, and most difficult thing I've ever felt. I was unused to loving someone as much as I have loved you, but this is the most beautiful thing I have ever created, and likely will ever create"

Will hummed, a warm feeling of happiness pouring through his body. He leaned into Hannibal's lips once more, holding their kiss until neither could remember what it was like to be apart. Will's hips moved again and Hannibal pulled away with a groan, making Will's mouth split into an impish grin. Hannibal smiled right back, feeling Will's fingers on his throat.

Hannibal could make love to Will anywhere, really. The kitchen, the dining room, the couch, the garden; anywhere there was a flat surface was fair game (as long as they cleaned it thoroughly afterwards, for Abigail's sake). However, Hannibal felt, for whatever reason, that tonight was to be spent in their bed. It couldn't be called their marital bed, not yet, since only their identities had been married, but that didn't matter much.

Will laid Hannibal down on the sheets, his lips claiming and exploring the familiar territory of his skin. Hannibal sighed in contentment, every kiss sending a shiver through his core. He begged with his body for more, and Will happily obliged, lifting his shirt up and kissing his chest. Hannibal moaned softly as Will possessed his body, slowly, sweetly. Hannibal attempted to reach to Will, to caress his neck, kiss his head, but Will pushed him gently away.

"Just relax, let me take care of you"

Hannibal shuddered as Will's hot mouth left a gentle bite on his chest. He did as he was told, relaxing into Will's touch. He hadn't noticed Will's hands fiddling with his fly until he felt his pants being stripped from his body, his underwear following shortly after. Will seemed to be totally content, coating his fingers in lube - *when did he reach for it?* - slicking and stretching Hannibal's hole. He received a low whine, Hannibal rolling his hips into his fingers. Hannibal could tell his lover was eager, certainly from the look in his eyes.

You can do with me as you wish, Will Hannibal thought. *Take control, take me. I surrender.*

Will discarded his pants before Hannibal could even comprehend it. He was on top of him now, pressing into him gently, and Hannibal gasped, gripping his shoulders desperately.

"Will!" Hannibal whispered, clutching him.

"Shh, it's okay," Will shushed him, petting his hair, damp with sweat, "I'll go slow"

"No, no don't, don't slow yourself-" Hannibal gasped, the stretching actually quite painful.

"Hannibal-"

"No! No don't- don't stop Will, please, let go for me-!"

Will realized what Hannibal wanted; to lose control. Will gave his desire to him quickly, burying himself deep inside with one thrust. Hannibal cried out.

"Yes, please-"

When Will rolled his hips forward Hannibal stopped talking, throwing his arms around Will's shoulders and spreading his legs further. Will groaned, rocking himself into his dearest with the need of a starving man.

You're perfect, you're perfect, I can't think, you're taking my mind, thank you Will, thank you.

Hannibal's thoughts were swirling in his mind, and every time Will rammed back into him, he lost himself once more to the intense heat. He leaned into Will's neck and breathed in, the man's skin smelling of blood and sex. The scent was intoxicating, addictive, and it sent Hannibal spiraling deeper into his devotion.

He mewled as Will suddenly growled into his neck, pace increasing.

"Take me, yes Will, take me," Hannibal pleaded softly, "I love you Will, I love you, I love you"

"I love you, Hannibal"

Hannibal's back arched and he gasped loudly, his orgasm hitting harder than he'd expected, and he saw stars as his cum coated his stomach. Will's hips bucked uncontrollably, Hannibal's clenching around his length pulling him deeper in. His own release was close, but he wanted something else first. He adjusted his angle, aiming his hips upwards. He hit Hannibal's prostate with complete accuracy, and delighted in the way the man beneath him sobbed, hands desperately searching for him. Will resumed his pace, abusing Hannibal's already sensitive prostate with each thrust.

"Will please, Will *please* , per favore mia dolcissima!"

The way Hannibal spoke those words went straight to Will's cock, and his speed became merciless as he approached climax.

" *Beg me* " Will growled.

"Please, cum inside, oh Will- Will, Will per favore, caro mio, bello mio, *Dio* mio"

Hannibal stared into Will's face as he praised him, prayed to him, watching the man unravel himself from his bindings. That façade was fading, and behind it was only Will, his love, his soul. He finally found religion, and his worship brought him a god's love. Will loved him, and it was a blessing.

All that I sacrificed, all that I lost, that I suffered, it was all so worth it to have you this way. Bare, perfect. You use me just as you were meant to, I was created for your use, I'm sure. I live now to worship and praise you. I have seen enough of your tears, and I have given you more pain than I ever wish to again. My fascination with your grief is sated. My only desire now is to see how beautiful you can be satisfied and spilling inside me, so please-

" *Please* "

Hannibal gasped as Will did just that, growling out his climax with one last deep thrust into Hannibal, spilling his seed as deep as he could, somehow knowing just how much Hannibal wanted it. He collapsed onto Hannibal's chest, panting from the exertion, and Hannibal's arms wrapped around him, the desperation now gone from his clutching hands. Hannibal moaned when Will pulled out, the ache in his ass already becoming quite apparent.

"I may not be able to sit normally for some time" Hannibal said breathlessly, just short of a whimper.

"Oh, no?" Will asked drowsily.

"The dining room chairs are hard"

"Oh how *terrible*"

He felt nothing.

"I'm not sure about the couch, either"

"That bad, huh?"

"Oh no, Will," Hannibal said, planting a contented kiss to Will's head, "that good"

Hannibal had long forgotten his equation to turn back time. Why would he need it, when he had everything he wanted right in front of him now? He would never use it again, he would never have to, because he would do everything right this time.

Will shall never suffer at my hands again, nor will Abigail. I promise them both this, I take an oath of my blood. I will happily spend my life protecting and raising our family. I will never reverse time again, I won't have to, because I will love them with everything I am. Perhaps, one day, I will be able to properly show them both my true devotion. Perhaps Will and I shall make these rings mean more than they already do, but there is no sense in rushing anything. After all, we're bound together, no matter what order or direction time travels in.

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